

## CHAPTER V

### SIXTH STAGE SISTERS:

#### A GROWTH SPURT TOWARD FLOWERING

##### THE OVER-Arching HYPOTHESIS

The Goffman study of **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** concluded that patterns of organization can deform and destroy persons. Even in extreme cases of pre-existing personality problems, Goffman contended that "what produced the hospital 'inmate' is less the patient's illness and more the hospital's structural organization." (*Asylums*, p. 10) With comparable evidence, T.W. Adorno and associates affirmed in *The Authoritarian Personality*, (1964, pp. 232-233), that it is socialization within highly dominative groups, whether the patriarchal or matriarchal home, autocratic classroom, monarchical Church, or bureaucratic workplace, that generates the authoritarian personality with its:

- preference for rule-oriented, highly structured life situations
- obsessive need for psychological security
- inability to entertain ambiguity or change
- superpatriotism and intense institutional loyalty
- greater love for stability than for freedom

The over-arching conclusion drawn from all the research cited in the preceding pages of this analysis is that dominative patterns of authority make destructive impact on persons and are, in consequence, immoral and indefensible. Regardless of the presumed good will of all involved, sisters in highly-structured, law-and-order-oriented corporation-congregations were likewise victimized, deformed in some measure, and fixated at what Lawrence Kohlberg categorizes as the 4th stage of moral maturation.

This form of mal-development exists where persons in both secular and religious life are taught that virtue lies in obeying but never questioning the lawful authorities who design or impose such patterns.

A break with past patterns of authoritarian structures and socialization is occurring world-wide on multitudinous fronts. Women, long-schooled in the mythology of female inferiority and in the virtues of docility, passivity and subservience to patriarchal dominance, are experiencing a growth-spurt in self-determination. After a winter of dormancy, this sudden spring, this thrust toward flowering raises a central and gripping question for those involved in this analysis of sisterhood change today:

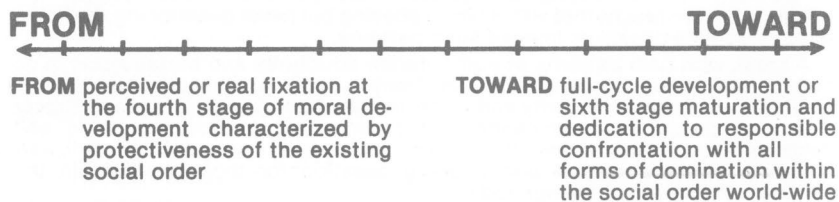
What catapulting forces are currently extricating sisters from real or apparent 4th stage fixation, and launching them sky-rocket-wise into 6th stage moral maturation, —into fearless confrontation-dedication unprecedented in the history of women in the Church?

Annals of Christianity spotlight the singularly courageous confrontations of a Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila, Joan of Arc, Margaret Ellen Traxler of Chicago, or Theresa Kane of Washington, D.C., but history presents no counterparts for the currently mushrooming, grass-roots sister-groups specifically designed to challenge dominative patterns in Church or society: Network, Womens' Ordination Conference, Quixote Center, National Coalition of American Nuns, the National Assembly of Women Religious, the international Sisters For Christian Community, the National Black Sisters' Conference, Las Hermanas, and the union of feminist theologians. Most of these represent a pooling of

charisms and talents surging up and spilling forth from a multitude of discrete sisterhoods.

Giving some empirical evidence of this new confrontation up-surge, Sister Marie Augusta Neal, professor of sociology at Emmanuel College, Boston, released in April, 1982, statistical survey data collected under the sponsorship of the National Assembly of Women Religious from 3,780 sisters in 20 congregations. Her research indicated a strong trend, among those in the sample, to believe that sisters should engage in works seeking to change unjust structures in society and the Church. 62 percent of the respondents thought that social justice should be the primary focus of the Church and 33 percent considered themselves so-involved. Only 64 percent support action against racism and for disarmament, and a mere majority of 54 percent favored the Equal Rights Amendment. The National Catholic News Service report of the survey said that the sample generally supported participatory government within their own congregations, and that 52 percent agreed that the Church should also become "democratized." Perhaps the term "collegialized" was intended. Nevertheless, this survey does support the hypothesis of this chapter that many sisters are moving from 4th stage fixation or conformity to dominative patterns institutionalized in Church or society, toward 6th stage social-justice-consciousness. If the above figures appear low and non-supportive of the hypothesis on some domination issues such as sexism, they may simply be reflecting the true randomness of the sample which would be fully representative of American sisters only were it to include proportionately the **EMERGING NEW SISTERHOODS**, the **RENEWING TRADITIONAL SISTERHOODS**, and the **DIMINISHING GROUPS**.

The goals of this chapter are now to review briefly the pattern changes transforming sister **SOCIALIZATION** methods, and to explore those forces now triggering this social justice ferment among sisters and other Christians, —forces which may be heralding the emerging **CHURCH RADIANT**. These trends of change support the sociological supposition that a wholly new genus of sister is appearing with ministry goals uniquely different from those characterizing precilliar sisters. They, united with fellow lay Christians, are likewise creating new expressions of the consecrated life initiated by Baptism which may well propel the Church from the Constantian pyramidal model, now on a collision course with collegiality, toward a participatory Christianity unprecedented throughout its history. In brief, then, this chapter forwards the hypothesis that sisters of the world are becoming immersed in a forceful movement, are journeying . . .



This chapter will explore the parameters of the above hypothesis, within the Lawrence Kohlberg paradigm of moral maturation, after first reviewing the various patterns of socialization recently operative in sisterhoods. This chapter will forward the conclusion that sisters have been set free from fourth stage fixation and torpedoed toward sixth stage transformation by the very contradictions and ambiguities which have caused catastrophic resignation, apathy, or despair in some others. Initially many sisters were spiritually and intellectually stretched by the freeing insights of Vatican II. Next, they were torn and fragmented by the great internal polarization generated by conflicting interpretations of conciliar theology and ecclesiology. Finally, they were frustrated and constricted by resistance to and retrenchment of Vatican II's vision by the very leaders expected to promote them. Ultimately, the impasse experienced has forced thousands of sisters and other well-informed Christians to transcend their former law-and-order socialization and to depend, instead, upon their own internal principles, charisms, and informed judgments. For many, this focal point of Church history is recognized as a watershed experience in their lives. They feel at the summit of the Great Divide, forced by the challenges of Vatican II

—to actualize the "freedom of the children of God"

- to respond to the directioning of their own reasoning
- to assume fuller responsibility for Church and society world-wide
- to help remove from Church and society those alienating, elitist, and domineering structures which have prevented full membership participation, which have infantilized persons through inaction, and which have, perhaps inadvertently, prevented Christians from attaining full personhood and fifth and sixth stage moral maturity

## THE NATURE OF SOCIALIZATION

Sociologists and psychologists speak of the slow, gradual learning of a group's culture, or blueprint of operation, as the socialization process. But within the traditional sisterhoods a speeded-up preparation for becoming an official congregation member, according to canonical specifications, has been called the **FORMATION PROGRAM** or novitiate period. In some of the newly-formed, non-canonical communities there is no specific period of preparation for living out one's baptismal consecration. However, one may hear of a **BECOMING PROCESS** instead, —an intensification of one's life-long orientation toward witnessing community-in-Christ.

Parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and superiors share a common role: —helping infants, interns, trainees, inductees, postulants, novices, pledges, rookies and sundry other neophytes learn the rules-of-the-game for various groups. During a lifetime, all persons need to be socialized for more adequate role-performance in the familial, educational, economic, political, recreational, medical, or military groups to which they belong. In each case their socialization or resocialization involves necessarily:

- the internalization of the values, norms, and goals of the group
- the learning of a specific set of person-made culture patterns
- the internal rooting of these patterns so deeply that they become woven into the very fabric of one's personality

## REQUISITES FOR SOCIALIZATION

Exposure to the culture of a group is not sufficient for its being internalized and adopted as one's own. Just as a vaccination may not take under some circumstances, so socialization or formation attempts may be subtly rejected unless the following conditions obtain:

- AFFECTION**, exposure in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance
- COMMUNICATION**, give-and-take sharing of all group information
- INTERACTION**, significant two-way contacts and cooperative actions

If affection, communication, or interaction are weak or partially absent in the socialization setting of infancy, childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, a person may come to wear the identity of a group as a mask only. Where one might presume that there is internal commitment to the group, there may be a void. For the sake of acceptance in peer group, school, club, place of employment, or even a sisterhood, —for the functional value of belonging, one may attempt to "pass" as a member and succeed in doing so for an indeterminate period of time. It is not an unusual practice in a complex culture such as ours for persons to play the role of membership in numerous settings without internally adhering to the values, norms, and goals of the groups. Groups are not infrequently used as stepping stones to other groups or vantage points.

If a group has a customary uniform, a special costume or dress style, the masking process is more easily effected. If a group has distinguishing external symbols, life style, rules and practices, it becomes increasingly difficult to sort authentic members from masqueraders. By amassing the externals of socialization, resocialization, or formation in highly symbol-visible groups, masqueraders may deceive even themselves. The mirror, if nothing else, assures one of authentic membership.

The distinguishing dress and veil of traditional sisters once spoke to the world of their dedication to the poor and needy, even if their middle class status had nothing to say in confirmation. Today, as identifying cultural artifacts are swept away, —as props of membership splash off into a sea of demythologizing culture change, the true nature of **COMMUNITY-IN-CHRIST** and the essence of what it

means to be Christ-committed women becomes more strikingly bared.

Young women in this last quarter of the 20th Century, disaffected by masks, titles, holy habits, horariums, pious practices, uniform life styles, corporate apostolates, and the idea of resocialization into a wholly different pattern of life, are, nevertheless, called to lives of deep commitment to Christ in communities of like-committed persons. Although the term **FORMATION** may carry for them connotations of painful shaping or re-shaping according to some preconceived expectations, the expression **BECOMING PROCESS** may bear an acceptable and welcoming nuance. It suggests that one continues what one has begun, that one remains in the **HOME WORLD** and becomes a full Christian woman without a contrived requirement of going off to a convent world to be re-formed, or hammered into some new and even culturally alien shape. If **BECOMING** can continue in the midst of Christian Community, then a vocation to the sisterhood pattern of the consecrated life may appear a more appealing and realistic undertaking.

The above is not simply a problem in semantics. **RESOCIALIZATION, FORMATION, or BECOMING** are not wholly interchangeable terms even though they participate in a common process: —the internalization of the values, norms, and goals of a specific group. Rather, these three forms of socialization, like the three Yuhaus categories of sisterhood, represent quite dissimilar approaches to the consecrated life and merit comparative analysis and the recognition that there is a definite trend of change involved here, a movement . . .



### SOCIALIZATION FOR PASSIVE PEASANTS

Traditionally, when a young girl stepped over the threshold of the motherhouse into the sisterhood subculture, —into the convent world of **TOTAL INSTITUTION**—, a resocialization process began with great intensity for an interval of time determined by canon law. The postulant was cautioned to “forget the world” as she concentrated on entering a “state of perfection.” The new-comers ac-culturation direction was under the supervision and guidance of persons of unquestionable integrity, but understandably for those times, of questionable knowledgeability. Undoubtedly some were skilled in directing young women toward Gospel values, but otherwise were often highly suppressive, —determined to retool the worldling into the then-current concept of a proper sister. Women with different temperaments, talents, philosophies of life and spirituality strove, however sincerely, to mold the postulant or novice according to their own preconceived notions of perfection, with seemingly great assurance that the same caste was suitable for all, —providing all were suitable candidates for the sisterhood.

The philosophy of the renaissance supported this cookie-cutter resocialization concept. Based on an erroneous and incomplete anthropology, the powerful political theorizing of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke seeped into all strata of life, including religious congregations. It made its own unique impact on the socialization and governing of sisters. In Hobbes' *Leviathan*, 1651, man's nature was described as naturally aggressive, selfish, solitary, and brutish, —so much so that interpersonal conflict was thought to be constant and unendurable until persons entered into social contract with one another, and proceeded by mutual assent, to form a society and submit to its authority for their own good. Locke's later philosophy was similar, but because he felt humans to be less depraved, he saw society and government as designed by rational men more for their convenience than for their survival.

Incorporating a comparably dim view of human nature as wounded by original sin, the male hierarchy of the Church saw women and children, especially, as in need of almost total guidance by either men superiors or superior women. These latter, of course, were the more educated ‘ladies’ of the upper classes or first estate, who like their kin, the feudal aristocracy, ruled the convents as their kin ruled the castles. The working class peasant girls who entered the convents or monasteries were undoubtedly awed to be allowed the opportunity to share a modicum of community with their betters, —the mother superiors and their coteries of counselors. The child-woman's total obedience was insisted upon as the posture of a proper subject. Because they were socialized in the medieval

society to be docile, passive, submissive, silent, dependent and self-effacing, convent life demanded of the peasant girls no abrupt retooling. Because personality is, in part, the product of social interaction and conformity to the expectations of significant others, the sisterhood pattern solidified and was passed from generation to generation of women seeking to serve Christian Community. As will be observed subsequently, this now obsolete model of religious life survived up to the point of inclusion in the rather conservative and ambiguous Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life of Vatican II.

### THE CONTRASTING AMERICAN PERSONALITY TYPE

Personality is one's recurrent response to interpersonal relationships, situations, and one's self. While some of its patterns are personal, internal, idiosyncratic or psychologically generated, others are learned procedures, —the impact of the culture, the product of group membership and interaction and hence socially generated.

Difficult though it is to assess personality characteristics in such a heterogeneous nation as multi-ethnic America, doctors Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, to mention but two anthropologists of note, pioneered studies of national character or group personality, and found relatively common traits associated with different peoples. Americans, for example, were seen as the products of their unique historical imprinting. The Puritans left a legacy of arduous work, drive, determinism, religious rigidity, and rugged individualism as part of the American spirit or national character. The stalwart pioneers who blazed the wilderness paths westward were self-made, self-assertive, keen-witted men and women who valued family, freedom, friends, courage, conquest of nature, and the grit to overcome all odds. Necessity became the mother of the pioneer personality. The frontier shaped the pioneers even as they shaped it in turn. In the process an image was formed which embodied all the qualities considered requisite for an American, —a composite pattern that would be used as a socialization model for small children destined to forward the building of the New World.

Meanwhile, into this New World culture came Old World patterns of the religious life. The demands of monastery and convent were wholly unlike those of the frontier and new American society. The goals of novitiate programs, therefore, were not to carry forward a **BECOMING PROCESS** already set in motion by the candidate's parents. On the contrary, the postulancy and novitiate periods became ones of **DESOCIALIZATION** followed by **RESOCIALIZATION**. The goal was to transform the American girl into the medieval sister-type. The earlier socialization directions had to be reversed in order to strip the postulant of self-will, self-reliance, initiative, creativity, leadership verve and success orientation. No matter what personality constellation a young woman brought with her into the convent, she was expected to conform to a new pattern, to play the role of **SISTER** according to the rules, in imitation of the foundress, the patron saint, and the formed sisters of final profession. The **RESOCIALIZATION** process provided ready-made rules, a ready-made identity, and even new guidelines for one's conscience. The religious life candidate was surrounded by social constraints to assure her conformity. Over-seeing administrators, senior sisters, age peers, public confession of faults, guilt at rule-infractions, and the ever-present threat of not being accepted for the next step along the route toward final vows, facilitated on-going **RESOCIALIZATION**.

A sister's vocation demanded that she transcend the American dream; her reformation required that she suppress the American national character. But a question has arisen these past few decades over the thousands of these once-resocialized women who have asked for dispensation from sisterhood membership and returned to the **HOME WORLD**. Had these American women internalized with true conviction the traditional canon law model of religious woman? A crucial and central question relative to our hypothesis is: Did the absence of the three requisites for true socialization, —the affection, communication, and interaction—, so rare in **TOTAL INSTITUTION** or bureaucracy, preclude the possibility of the socialization being truly internalized and of its impacting deeply on the personality? Had the resocialization or formation programs really succeeded in removing the initial personality imprints of childhood and adolescence? Had the sleeping American character within them simply been awaiting the kiss-of-life of Vatican II? Is it the pioneering spirit of parents and grand-

parents which now propels hundreds of those who left traditional congregations to continue their Christian **BECOMING** as adventurers, explorers, trail-blazers and builders of new models of the consecrated life in Christian Community?

However that might be, the loss of over sixty-five thousand American sisters from apostolic and contemplative congregations during the past two decades, has served as a needed catalyst for more intensive questioning and analysis. The current situation has brought vocation directors to a perplexing crossroad. They wonder about the advisability of continuing to counsel American girls and women into streams of spirituality, social structures, or cultural conditioning suitable, perhaps, for a former period in history but of problematic efficacy today. In the past two decades several popes have urged sisters to update and renew, but reluctance, resistance, and retrenchment still characterize some congregations.

### **VOCATION DIRECTION DILEMMA**

Because sisterhoods are so widely strung out along the **CHANGELESS-CHANGE CONTINUUMS**, vicars for religious, diocesan vocation directors, and spiritual counselors of other types suffer an unenviable dilemma as they ponder these questions:

1. How does one determine whether a counselee is a compatible candidate for **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, for the newly democratized but bureaucratized **RENEWING CONGREGATIONS**, or for the new-type **COLLEGIAL COMMUNITIES**?
2. Is it conceivable that thousands of young women in America and world-wide, are avoiding the sisterhood style of consecrated life entirely because they have a spiritual disposition, personality mode, and temperament suitable for one of the above patterns, but are wholly unaware of the pluralism in religious life and the possibility of alternative choices in life-styles and social structure models?
3. In a multi-polarized sisterhood where all three orientations are represented by the membership, who selects the formation personnel? On what basis are they selected? Are those chosen qualified because they are **TOTAL INSTITUTION** oriented, or because they are not? Are they broad enough in understanding all three orientations to enable them to recognize a candidate's specific leaning and refer her, if need be, to another traditional community or new community on that basis?
4. What happens in an apostolic congregation where there is a team of vocational personnel or formation directors in which each team member is inadvertently or subtly undermining the others because each represents a different stream of spirituality, theology, ecclesiology, etc.?
5. Is it because of these divergent streams and dissimilar convictions that some sisterhoods seem to have a current moratorium on welcoming new members?
6. Which sisterhoods are not waiting for some future homogeneity of focus but are broadening their perspectives to include a complete spectrum of life styles and ministries? Which are encouraging each member to freely respond to the patterns that compliment her talents and charisms, her interests and modal personality?

### **MODAL PERSONALITY RESEARCH**

The basic premise of modal personality theory, it may be recalled, is that a person tends to be like the persons with whom one associates. One adopts their dispositions, values, beliefs, action patterns, philosophy of life and religious convictions to some measure. Persons are all shaped, in part, by their social environment and therefore, in every culture and subculture, a common personality type emerges. Parents implicitly urge their children to become like themselves as do others responsible for socialization. The careful screening process characteristic of sisterhoods probably prevented too dissimilar types from entering or advancing along the postulant-to-final-profession progression schedule. If administrators appointed formation personnel most likely to perpetuate the group's collective personality, this model would become pervasive throughout an entire province or total congregation. Authoritarian types would socialize others, by example and precept, to be authoritarian types: passive, submissive and conforming

when in the lower ranks, but dominant, aggressive, assertive, dogmatic and dictatorial when in positions of power over students, boarders, patients, agency staff or inmates, nurses, teachers, convent subjects or age subordinates.

The Sisters' Survey of the late 1960's included the Adorno F-Scale, —a device for measuring authoritarianism. Congregations across the United States and Canada who participated in the research project initiated by the National Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and directed by researcher Sister Marie Augusta Neal, SND, learned of the pervasiveness of this personality type in their congregations, —a logical expectation in light of the **TOTAL INSTITUTION** pattern also associated with authoritarianism. The over-all national picture did indicate that there had been a gradual decline in the phenomenon within each descending age bracket until the youngest stratum was reached. Then, surprisingly, in view of the assumed liberalism of the National Sisters' Formation Program of the 1960's, the descending graph line upped into what statisticians call the J-curve. The youngest members of some congregations were showing higher rates of authoritarianism than their immediate predecessors. Several reasons can be hypothesized to account for the selection factor which seemed apparent in the J-curve:

1. Either sisterhoods in the mid-sixties were attracting more authoritarian type persons favoring the more bureaucratically-structured congregations, and were repelling non-authoritarian types, or
2. Vocation screeners were weeding out the more free-spirited, non-authoritarian, non-conforming types with greater consistency, or
3. The alternately liberal-conservative, highly ambiguous document On the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life of Vatican II, which reaffirmed the superior as ultimate decision-maker, thereby gave a justification for regression to an earlier mode of socialization asking for conformity and blind obedience. The impact of this document might conceivably have been tracked by the Adorno F-Scale. (The F is for facism.)

Whatever the case, the data proved disconcerting and left many wondering if the planned liberalism of the Sister Formation Movement as initiated by Sister Annette Walters, CSJ, SFCC, and Sister Rita Mary Bradley, now SFCC, was more rhetoric than reality in some settings. In light of the J-curve findings in the late 1960's, it seems logically imperative that diocesan vocation counselors take into account the fact that at least three structure patterns, modal personality types, and views on the nature of religious life itself, coexist on the sisterhood scene, —sometimes within the same sisterhood.

Discovery of the modal personality type of a specific congregation is no simple task. Methodology must be used that is suitable for determining personality characteristics of large numbers of persons. The use of the F-Scale proved highly insightful but additional new instruments can be administered to cooperating groups.

In 1961, Alex Inkeles, Eugenia Haufman, and Helen Beir published a research entitled "Modal Personality and Adjustment to the Soviet Sociopolitical System," in which they described their attempts to discover the relationship between personality modes and adjustment to the Soviet pattern of life. For economic and political reasons, a sampling of Russians in Russia was prohibitive. However, the Russian Research Center of Harvard University located three thousand Russian defectors of the World War II era, as a sample of those who did not adjust to a **TOTAL SYSTEM**. These were given questionnaires. Three hundred of the sample gave detailed life-history interviews. Fifty-one who appeared most representative of the sample agreed to be given a variety of clinical tests for personality inventories. As anticipated, analysis of the sample revealed a cluster of common traits, or a dominant modal personality for the group. Members showed these characteristics:

- a strong need for affiliation
- dependence upon external supports
- interpersonal trust-vs-mistrust conflicts
- high self-esteem
- high emotional volatility

The researchers concluded that they could attribute the defection from Russia to situations in Russia that would be highly antithetical to the personality needs and dispositions of the sample:

1. Opposing the sample's need for trust relations was the government practice of political surveillance of even its own citizens.
2. Opposing the sample's dependence on external supports was rapid social change that put too great a strain on that mode of personality relying heavily on external support.
3. The distance between the Communist elites and the masses contradicted the Communist claim of a classless society and the sample's strong need for affiliation.
4. Also in conflict with the sample's affiliation need on a more intimate level was Russia's replacement of informal, traditional communities with more formal, bureaucratic, collective structures that deemphasized small groups and warm, primary relations.

Russian sociologists have also been developing instruments for the better understanding of modal personality types. Georgii Smirnov, writing in **VOPROSY FILOSOFII** (January, 1971, 25, 1:26-35) "On the Concept of Socialist Type Man" described him as sharing with his comrades a collectivist orientation, a spirit of comradely cooperation, and a sense of public identity through public ownership of public products. The imprint of Russian socialization is highly manifest in this modal personality profile.

With modifications the Inkeles, Haufman, Beir research tool could throw comparable light on characteristics of those persons in religious life who need the security of a modified **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, or those who in it would languish or defect. Granted, personality factors cannot be attributed to any single force such as socialization. Other factors must be included for analysis in order to augment understanding of the polarization in sisterhoods and reasons for the unusual rates of exodus and diminished entrances. But were vocation directors able to take modal personality into account, they could refer some counselees to the more highly structured sisterhoods, others to the more free-form ones. Some sisters need **TOTAL INSTITUTION**-like security; others need community.

### **MODERNITY ORIENTATION NO RESPECTOR OF AGE**

Social science research shows that sisters of advancing age are not necessarily the cause of a congregation's stagnation in the face of needed change. However, change resistant administrators could easily use the aging as the scapegoats for their own personal opposition to it. It is true that the median age in American and European sisterhoods is unusually high, —sometimes estimated to be in the seventies. This has moved many sisterhoods to convert novitiates and juniorates into geriatric wards or residential areas for the increasingly aging population. But research indicates that old age is not to be equated with a malaise of spirit. Even under the suppressive weight of **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, thousands of older sisters survived as strong, indomitable personalities and fearless spokeswomen for a return to community. Many aging persons remain ageless in their openness to the Holy Spirit and the currents of history.

In cross-cultural modal personality research, Alex Inkeles employed the OHM scale to measure or gage a person's or group's degree of

- openness to new experiences
- readiness to try new ways of doing things
- adventuresomeness
- insistence upon a substantial amount of personal choice, etc.

His research indicated that modernity orientation transcends both national boundaries and chronological age.

### **VOCATIONAL SCREENING IN SISTERHOODS**

To test or not to test has been a controversial issue in some sisterhoods. Opponents of psychological testing for screening purposes contend, perhaps rightly, that dozens of saints and even mother foundresses would have been disqualified for membership in their own sisterhoods were such soul-surveillance



and personality profiling in vogue at their time. The dimensions of this negative perspective can be most speedily highlighted in the following scenario:

#### ACT I

Once-upon-a-long-time ago, in the third century to be exact, two distinguished theologians, Hippolytus and Novatian, "ran for pope." Both failed. When the white smoke swirled up from the Sistine Chapel chimney it was announced that Callistus was elected. Promptly, the rigorist, Hippolytus, confronted the new pope with the accusation that he was unfit for office because he favored allowing too many shady characters in the Church, not just in the Church door, mind you, but through baptism into full membership. Stormed the theologian, Hippolytus:

- You are too soft on sinners!
- They should be put out permanently!
- That parable of the wheat and cockle is for the birds!
- Noah's Ark with clean and unclean animals stinks as an analogy, too!
- It is down-right embarrassing to have all those sinners in the Church!
- We should screen them!
- Those who can't measure up should be cast out!
- Christians should be models of perfection!
- We are, after all, the **ELITE** of God, and should act like it!

And good Pope Cal rebutted Hip emphatically, saying:

- Hip, the Church is a "corpus mixtum," —a mixed bag!
- We are an assortment of saints and sinners!
- Some of us are **BOTH**, alternately or simultaneously!
- Christ said: Let the wheat and the weeds grow together!
- Leave the separation to the last judgment!
- Even then we might be surprised!
- Meanwhile, we'll accept all comers and their children!
- Sure, we'll have a mass at Mass!
- Sure, it will be tough to experience community if our numbers hit up in the millions!
- Sure, some will be luke-warm at best!
- But Hip, what's Christian Community all about if not just a bunch of plain people ministering in love to a bunch of plain people?

#### ACT II

Once-upon-a-short-time-ago, 1960's to the 1980's to be exact, two distinguished psychologists, Sister Survey and Padre Probe, devised a fail-safe strategy for screening misfits out of sisterhoods, seminaries and other elite groups. These two doctors were living in an era when it was very fashionable to use sophisticated psychological voyeurism from the Oval Office to the pyramidal Church:

- cameras that see in the dark
- peering electronic eyes
- probing electronic ears
- telephone taps
- lie detectors
- hidden tape recorders
- outrageously intrusive tests

Both Sister Sal Survey and Padre H. Probe had the proper credentials to be expert examiners, observers, testors, and administrators of such divining devices as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. They were living at the ripe time for such fruitful research;

- at an hour when such insidious impingement of another's right to privacy had gained professional respectability
- at an hour when the Defense Department had over 100,000 security investigations carried out yearly by 25,000 trained investigators

—at an hour when private industry, department stores, super-markets, and credit corporations hired private investigatory firms to collect, microfilm or computerize the biographical data on millions of Americans that lay bare their familial, financial, medical, social, sexual, and religious practices, —even their golf scores

—at an hour when genteel sisterhoods and seminaries were thought to need the services of suave, sophisticated psychologists to scrutinize souls, to reveal the moral patterns and personality tendencies of applicants to religious life or the priesthood, —a process euphemistically called **VOCATIONAL SCREENING**.

So, charged with Christian concern and armed with a battery of testing devices, Sister Sal Survey and Padre H. Probe placed an advertisement in all religious papers and journals reading:

**DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE JESUS MADE**  
**SCREEN out your Judases!**  
We do psychological examinations in seminaries, motherhouses, monasteries novitiates and rectories . . .  
Consultation fee only \$100-a-head  
Write **SOUL SURVEILLANCE, INC.**  
Sister Sal (acious) Survey  
Padre Hippolytus Probe

Scenario END

Vocational screening, however, is a respected process when based upon the following rationale:

1. Tests quickly and efficiently reveal psychological pathologies.
2. Tests are no more invasive than lab-scans of blood, tissue, and marrow.
3. They pinpoint mental malignancies or tendencies, —thus facilitating therapeutic follow-up or spiritual counseling.
4. They do expose negative qualities in the tantee's personality but they also uncover skills and talents to be encouraged.
5. They save time, money, and heartache for both applicant and institution if decisions are premised on their data.
6. They indicate sincere concern for the mental and emotional health of Catholic Church service personnel and indicate the greater likelihood of attention to and correction of causal factors when known or understood.
7. In actual practice, testing has been found highly insightful. Priest-psychologist Eugene Kennedy, for example, conducted a study of priests commissioned by the American Bishops which revealed that a large proportion of them are "under-developed people." Even with college degrees, seminary training, daily Mass and breviary, their formation in responsibility in community appeared a missing element. (See *The Catholic Priest in the United States: A Psychological Investigation*)

Even with this professional justification well known, however, some communities prefer to avoid the privacy invasion inherent in the process of psychological screening. The Sisters For Christian Community, for example, incline toward Pope Callistus' open-door policy. Their poverty ideal eschews any form of elitism in admission requirements. One of their founding goals, as previously mentioned, was to be a bridge over troubled waters for some of the personality-damaged refugees from **TOTAL INSTITUTION**. This ideal precluded psychological screening. Core SFCC members knew that the Church, in justice

and love, must minister toward the healing and return to wholeness of those individuals psychologically scarred by person-deforming social structures, or even the devastating intrusion of Jansenism, inadvertently approved by the Church in some forms. The Sisters For Christian Community did understand thirteen years ago, and presently, that core members were likely to be high Y's in exodus from pyramidal structures, persons who had not internalized fully the self-effacement and submissiveness demanded by canonical obedience. They were persons likely to be in the fifth and sixth levels of maturation as described by Kohlberg. This paradigm, incidentally, can itself operate as an excellent screening device for determining the suitability of persons for a more formalized service commitment to the Church. Individuals discussing it can soon see, almost-at-a-glance, their own maturation level and are better able to screen themselves out of such a long lasting commitment if they feel unable to stretch toward full personhood.

## KOHLBERG'S PARADIGM OF MORAL MATURATION

In a study far more complex and detailed than Jean Piaget's classic and pioneer research, *The Moral Judgment of School Children*, 1932, Lawrence Kohlberg, in *The Development of the Modern Mind, Thinking and Choice in Years 10-16*, 1971, outlines and analyzes three levels and six stages of moral development through which a maturing person travels on the journey toward achieving full personhood. Kohlberg estimates that perhaps fifty percent of Americans never develop formal reasoning at all and remain for their entire lives fixated at the fourth stage of moral development. Because of the authoritarian socialization in **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, it seems highly probable that even in religious life this fixation occurred. The presence of the patriarchal model of family and parish in the Catholic subculture, the dominative authority patterns suppressing women and children, particularly, precluded the possibility or likelihood of their full development toward independence and the self-sufficiency requisite for full-circle maturation. Ever-so-briefly condensed, Kohlberg's original developmental steps are as follows:

- I. **THE PRECONVENTIONAL LEVEL OF MORAL MOTIVATION** (Premoral, pre-social, egocentric)
  - Stage I That which brings me physical pleasure is **GOOD**  
That which brings me physical pain is **BAD**
  - Stage II That which satisfied my **BASIC NEEDS** is **GOOD**  
That which is not satisfying is **BAD**
- II. **THE CONVENTIONAL LEVEL**
  - Stage III That which is approved by my family and significant others is **GOOD**  
That which they disapprove is **BAD**
  - Stage IV That which maintains order and is sanctioned by **LAW** is **GOOD**  
That which violates **LAW** or **CUSTOM** is **BAD**
- III. **THE POSTCONVENTIONAL LEVEL**
  - Stage V That which is a matter of personal value, a rational option, and for the **COMMON GOOD** is **RIGHT**  
That which violates one's personal integrity is wrong
  - Stage VI **RIGHT** is a decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen abstract principles relating to social justice, human rights, personal dignity, global concerns and universal values  
**WRONG** is a contradiction of conscience, a capitulation to peer pressure, group-think, and unexamined law

## SIXTH STAGE SISTERHOODS

Sisters' socialization of the past was rule-oriented, law-based, and as such, challenged sisters to mature upward toward the 4th stage of maturation. Today this rule-and-custom-book mode of socialization is recognized widely as no longer adequate nor morally defensible. Vatican II (Declaration on Religious Freedom, 1:3) reaffirmed conscience as being the ultimate court in one's

decision-making but there seems to be clerical ambivalence in promoting such a viewpoint universally. There is tardiness also in the development of other aspects of 5th and 6th stage maturation and global concern. For example, it was at least a decade after the Civil Rights Revolution of the 1960's, after Doctor Martin Luther King's reception of the Nobel Peace Award and his death for the cause of justice, that the American bishops, as a body, issued a group statement condemning **RACISM** as a serious moral evil. Today, in the midst of the revolution for womens' rights, the bishops have given united assent to the Equal Rights Amendment, have had sessions of dialogue with representatives of the Womens' Ordination Conference, have slowly approved a more non-sexist vocabulary in the liturgy, but as yet have given no indication, as a conference, that the woman-devaluing **SEX-ISM** within the Church is a moral evil to be exorcised. Nevertheless, it is quite evident that for the past few years there has been a new social justice ferment at the national meetings of American bishops and some have taken courageous public stands on the issues of nuclear arms build-up, on military aid to Latin American countries, on government retrenchment of financial aid to the poor, etc.

Although the *Oregonian*, January 2, 1975, published the news note that only 43 percent of Italy's 143,000 sisters had completed the elementary school, in America the Catholic sisters have been known to be the most highly educated body within the Church, and discounting the National Association of University Women, probably in the society as well. Nevertheless, during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's their leadership roles in racial justice, women's rights, and other social issues has been all but missing, giving the impression thereby of 4th stage fixation for the vast majority of sisters, or of congregational restrictions on their freedom to be actively involved in national and international movements.

#### **SIXTH-STAGENESS: A REQUISITE FOR AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY**

Only in 6th stage sisters are the values, norms, and goals of Christianity truly internalized, made one's own, and acted upon regardless of:

- the pain involved
- the punishment threatened
- the risk of ridicule
- the threat of job or membership loss
- the ostracism by friends, relatives or fellow sisters
- the necessary critiquing of even papal statements or Sacred Congregation rulings
- the seeming disloyalty to fellow-sisters, teachers, counselors, parents, pastors, friends
- the needed affirmation that law and custom must change in accord with reason, research, and lived experiences even if apart from the viewpoints of authorities in power
- the need to devalue order for order's sake, tradition for tradition's sake
- the price of being true to internal principles, God's voice in one's conscience rather than men's rulings if the two seem contradictory
- the price of denouncing entrenched practices or policies within the Church that are forms of **DOMINATION** destructive of persons:
  - authoritarianism
  - paternalism
  - maternalism
  - sexism
  - racism
  - classism
  - castism
  - clericalism
  - TOTAL INSTITUTION**
  - bureaucracy
  - selective communication
  - secretiveness
  - censorship

The real revolution affecting sisters lies here, in an expanding **BONDEDNESS** with all women, an enlarging global consciousness, and a call to courageous confrontation with persons, policies, or practices unjustly dominating others. Vital

forces are being generated in women throughout the world, —vital forces accelerating their growth in responsible concern for social issues, pushing them with aspirations for full personhood. This **BECOMING** surge is a life-long process, an ebbing and flowing toward **WHOLENESS, ONENESS, COPRESENCE, and COMMUNITY.**

The great mid-century psychiatrist, Karen Horney, concluded during a brilliant career as researcher, writer, lecturer and clinical therapist, that in our relations with one another we are capable of moving in only three directions:

- TOWARD** others
- AGAINST** others
- AWAY** from others



Only in the first, **TOWARDNESS**, do we recognize persons at the fifth and sixth stages of moral and spiritual maturation. Only **TOWARDNESS** is the hallmark of exceptional mental health and true God-centeredness. That which defines our humanness and our wholeness is **TOWARDNESS, COPRESENCE, and COMMUNITY**

### **BECOMING: — A NECESSARILY PERSISTENT MOVEMENT**

Sisterhoods may be ending the era of formal novitiates and explicit formation programs as they recognize **BECOMING** as a life-long process. The world itself is still in stages of evolutionary **BECOMING**. The Church, once conceived of as a perfect society, now sees itself as in embryonic form, —a struggling and erring pilgrim People forever in the process of becoming the **CHURCH RADIANT**. God's revelation, once viewed as a finished product between the covers of Old and New Testament books, is viewed now as a forever-informing process. The revelation which spills out from the literary forms of sacred scripture, from its poetry, parables, myths, historical accounts and fictional scenarios, is currently recognized as being complimented increasingly by the conjoined **SCIENTIFIC MODE OF REVELATION**. We are convinced now that we can discover more each day about God's reality and our own reality through the pursuit of hypotheses and empirical data, —even through the stirred-together research paradigms of a Kohlberg, Kopp, and Karen Horney who concur that becoming a whole person is a gradual movement . . .



- FROM** Stage I **PLEASURE-PAIN MOTIVATION** (at whatever chronological age)
  - lacking in awareness of others
  - seeking immediate gratification and rewards
  - avoiding punishment or discomfort
  - making self-serving demands on others
  - moving **AWAY** from and **AGAINST** anyone or anything that displeases
  - avoiding the self-sacrificing that **TOWARDNESS** demands
- FROM** Stage II **BASIC NEED SATISFACTION MOTIVATION**
  - entering relationships through self-interest
  - giving in order to receive
  - demanding love but withholding reciprocal affection
  - talking but not listening
  - accusing others to vindicate self
  - being closed-minded, closed-hearted
  - being self-centered, self-assertive
  - ignoring the rights of others

- failing to generalize beyond face-to-face situations
- tending toward **AWAYNESS** and **AGAINSTNESS** to protect one's basic needs

—FROM Stage III

**SECURITY IN FAMILY AND PEER APPROVAL**

- conforming to the moral choices of others
- avoiding formal thought and independent judgment
- yielding to peer-pressure and group-think
- submitting unquestioningly to superiors
- feeling that actions are right if conforming to the views of significant others
- being motivated to please and not disappoint those who matter most
- fearing loss of popularity, recognition, response if one takes controversial stands
- seeing others as critics and accusers
- feeling worthless and inadequate when not applauded
- shunning responsibility and decision-making for one's self and others lest a humiliating mistake occur
- moving **AWAY** from and **AGAINST** the **OUTGROUP**
- feeling **TOWARDNESS** only for family and peers

—FROM Stage IV

**SECURITY THROUGH CONFORMITY TO LAW AND CUSTOM**

- internalizing the social system as the structure of one's conscience
- seeking justification for all one's actions in law or tradition
- finding security in ritual, rules, and order
- coveting authority roles for self and friends
- dominating others to assure their conformity to law or custom
- seeing the virtue of obedience as the submission of one's will to law or a superior
- feeling that another's freedom-seeking or non-compliance as threatening to self and the social order
- demanding that lawful authority never be questioned
- moving **AWAY** from or **AGAINST** those who think differently
- esteeming law and order but less the love and freedom that are the true hallmarks of Christianity

—TOWARD Stage V

**SOCIAL CONTRACT AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS MOTIVATION**

- adopting guiding moral principles apart from the authority of one's groups and significant others
- making principled efforts to modify or remove unjust laws, cultural patterns, or social policies
- recognizing the relativity of all social norms but affirming the importance of law in achieving social stability
- defending the human values of life, liberty, freedom, justice and equality from arbitrary countering
- upholding principles of democracy and utility or the greatest good for the greatest number
- holding the common good above individual good
- beginning to sense that the majority must also be concerned with the rights of the minority
- experiencing irreversible moral choices
- listening, dialoguing, mutually deciding

- correcting self, accepting self, giving self
- showing concern for the growth of local communities
- moving **TOWARD** cooperation and understanding with **OUTGROUPS** holding dissimilar cultures and values
- recognizing **AGAINSTNESS** and **AWAYNESS** as immature approaches to persons and issues

—**TOWARD Stage VI CONCERN FOR UNIVERSAL ETHICAL VALUES AND WORLD PEOPLES**

- gifting others with the freedom to be different
- recognizing authority as the **RIGHT** and the **RESPONSIBILITY** of adults to author ideas and actions for the common good
- envisioning obedience, then, as critical thinking and listening to the good judgments and charisms of self and others
- understanding that **DOMINANCE** of others, the denial in part or in whole of another's right to participatory decision-making for the common good, is a moral evil preventing maturation to full personhood in the other
- knowing then, that respectful but forceful confrontation is a necessary response to injustices deriving from **DOMINATION** by persons, policies, or practices in Church or society
- feeling deeply responsible for the freeing of all persons from whatever forms of subjugation
- adding operational commitment to justice principles that can claim universal validity
- affirming **CONFRONTATION**, then, as a form of loving **TOWARDNESS**, a condition for justice, peace, and community

**VOCATIONS TO CONFRONTATION: THE SILENT REVOLUTION**

Preconciliar Sisters were, with sincere convictions, seeing the will of God in the *status quo* imposed by lawful congregational, Church, or civil authorities. They had been schooled to believe that virtue lay in submitting their thoughts views and judgments to the thoughts views and judgments of all superiors. Yet today, as part of the **SILENT REVOLUTION** sweeping through the Church, thousands of those same Sisters are challenging the *status quo* in multiple settings and are daring to confront even the ecclesial hierarchy regarding the entrenched patterns of domination continuing to deform the Church. Positive forces freeing Sisters and other women for 6th Stage Maturation include:

- advancement in higher education for women
- an international climate of research and exposure of old myths
- Conciliar and postConciliar breakthroughs in theological, ecclesiological, and biblical understandings

Concurrently, negative forces have exerted comparable revelatory impact:

- catastrophic wars engineered by men and nations for **DOMINANCE**
- a nuclear arms supremacy race for world **DOMINATION**
- the threatened abortion of many Vatican II charisms urging a participatory Christianity free of clerical **DOMINANCE** and discrimination against women

Hard research data is unavailable to explain the reasons why Sisters are moving today into vocations of confrontation and 6th Stage Moral Maturation. Those desiring a deeper understanding of the phenomenon must rely upon collected opinions and studied conjectures. To most speedily facilitate the elaboration and synthesis of some such opinions into one plausible whole, this chapter will conclude by packing them into one small scenario, —a letter from Sister Clara to Sister Fran. This letter, like the parables of scripture, will attempt to encapsulate a mine of insights into some few moments of fictionalized facts:

a mine of insights into some few moments of fictionalized facts:

Dear Fran,

Loving greetings! I hasten to share some good but possibly surprising news. I have volunteered for the Peace Corps! My knowledge of eleven foreign languages is not being wasted here at the college, but now that Sister Hazel has finished her doctorate, she can replace me as department head. My acceptance of this challenge was approved by Mother Provincial months ago. Perhaps I shocked her a little with my alternate plan. "It's either the Peace Corps, Mother," I said, "or an all-Black college in the Deep South for which Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler and the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice are seeking highly degreed teachers." Mother graciously gave permission for Peace Corps providing I'd clear this with the cardinal. The latter insisted I ask the Sacred Congregation for Religious so I'm presently awaiting an answer . . .

Fran, please do not be worried that I am launching off into a new phase of teaching activity at age sixty-five when I could be retiring. As you know, I've had a full and fruitful life here in Philadelphia, but there is so much more energy left in me that I would share it with the whole world were that possible! Teaching languages to Peace Corps volunteers at a university in the Philippines will help me serve the entire Third World vicariously, and express a great urgency arising in me. Fran, I can almost hear you exclaiming: "For heaven's sake, Clara, what **URGENCY!**" Well, dear Sister, you and I go back a long way. Often have we pondered together about what this moment of history might be asking of sisters, and what might be our new forms of witness in the 21st Century. Well, Fran, I've finally put some fragmented thoughts together and have reached a conclusion, —for me, at least. I'm not putting down the teaching of languages or anything else, but the new vocation I see for sisters is **CONFRONTATION**. **CONFRONTATION** can be accomplished where and when needed no matter what our daily work roles or living styles may be. Those two big concerns of the past will be secondary, —almost incidental, perhaps, to the sisters of tomorrow. I'll try to sum up briefly what has pushed me to this conclusion, —probably a dozen forces, but I'll mention just some of the major ones: incessant war, the arms race, the retrenchment of Vatican II hopes, the silence of the International Union of Superiors General, and the Church's inertia in correcting power abuses in itself. I know that this seems like a crazy assortment, but combined they have hit me with an imperative: Clara, you've got to get into this life-and-death fray. No retirement into some Shangri La-ish convent for you!" Even the contradictions and ambivalence in the Vatican II documents have been cathartic! In a sense, they are like prods at my back pushing me to be more responsive to Church and world needs. So, alright, I'll stroke out a bit in detail what I mean by those major forces pushing me and undoubtedly thousands of other sisters to **CONFRONTATION** with the Church and society, —pushing me to widen my horizons beyond concern for the Philadelphia Church and the national community.

### FIRST, WORLD WAR AND AFTERMATH

Fran, the Great War and all the lesser ones since have been for me, probably for most persons, a massive revelation regarding human and institutional impotency and impermanence. With machine-gun-like staccato these thoughts keep shattering my peace of mind:

- Modern life is a power struggle almost out of control
- World leaders are little men, largely ineffectual and myopic



- Christianity seems a frayed and fragile veneer over the deeply-rooted barbarism of Western Civilization
- The Church appears incapable of coping with war, —hardly an influence for peace among the Christians who are at war more than other peoples
- Creative imagination and leadership charisms seem very rare in Rome and in dioceses throughout the world
- The clerics seem to live in in-house political quagmires which seem to incapacitate them in confronting the moral issues of **SEXISM, RACISM, WAR, NUCLEAR ARMS BUILD-UP**, etc.
- Today we have to think and act responsibly with other lay persons to help prevent a world holocaust

## SECOND, THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

Fran, who isn't scared silly by this threat? We just must join in the protest. Like a perpetual siren scream, that build-up warns:

- I can destroy your planet in a flash of light
- Only global love and justice are effective counter-forces
- The United Nations, like the Church, is embryonic in effectiveness
- The United States is shackled by competing mega-corporations and the push to ever-more arms build-up by conservatives of the Moral Majority type
- Are you going to leave the issue of war to the men, Clara?
- Will you retire now into a comfortable convent and plug your ears?
- Must you not pool your energies with conservationists and war protestors to help save this plundered planet?

## THIRD, THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL

Fran, this group may seem in strange company with the war lords! But their **SILENCE** is also beeping to me a message loud and clear. They know well that we world sisters are intensely worried about the state of health of religious sisterhoods today. The fact that we are nearly a half-million fewer than two decades ago is a statistic that needs their public comments, and more importantly, their more accurate statistics. But what does the IUGS share with either the press or sisters? Quite frankly, next to nothing. Non-communication, to me, spells suppression of information to which we all have a right by reason of our being part of the world Catholic sisterhoods. We have our whole lives invested in this pattern of service. I suspect that the IUGS knows that traditional patterns of religious life are crumbling all over the world but they want to keep our morale up for a few more years by not discussing it. Why don't they report about what really concerns us? Why not at least encourage us by making information available on the wholly new patterns of Christ-commitment that are arising out of the roots or ashes of old forms? Have you noticed, Fran, that the majority of articles in the religious publications beamed at sisters are on prayer? They may be splendid, but they seem to me but a splendid smoke screen over the signs of the times in sisterhoods. I've done a sketchy content analysis of *Review For Religious and Sisters Today* over the past years since the Council, and I have found relatively few articles written by sisters for sisters about sisterhood renewal and change. When the *National Catholic Reporter* mentions the international meetings in Rome of the IUGS, it's a two or three liner in the news briefs, making me wonder what they met for at all if it proved so little news-worthy. In the *Pope Speaks* I read yearly what the Pope said to the Mother Generals at their opening sessions, but not what they said to him or shared with us. Do you ever hear our sisters protesting this, Fran? Do we ever respectfully demand more information than we get? Is this silent response in sisters to the silence of the superiors general, and other Church leaders, a sign of our indifference or apathy, of our contentment or of our cynicism, or of our quiet despair over being ignored? Is the silence of the grass roots sisters the result of our usual resolution of a painful incongruity by **SELECTIVE PERCEPTION** as we try to convince ourselves that the annual omission of the "state of the sisterhoods" report is perfectly compatible with trust in superiors to do most of our thinking for us, —and our worrying? And I keep wondering, Fran, why those superiors general cling to that archaic and militaristic designation in a world where the equalitarian idealism of millions

finds utterly distasteful the **SUPERIOR-INFERIOR** dichotomy in Christian Community, and military titles used by sisters. In a would-be Vatican II-oriented Church where we are to be co-equals-in-Christ on His own say-so, the **SUPERIORS GENERAL** bit is a fantastic anomaly. My personal integrity pushes me to respectful confrontation with that whole concept of authority. Practically the whole world watched with intense interest the Nuremberg Trials of German war criminals, the Watergate scandal, the Jonestown Massacre. In all three cases, responsibility-remission was claimed by those who were just blindly following Hitler's, Nixon's, or Reverend Jones' orders. These were tragedies that helped to make all but defunct the now-discredited concept of blind obedience. After watching or reading about these three spectacles, don't you bet, Fran, that most people in the world today would agree that:

- to take one's own freedom of will or judgment, —a God given gift, to abrogate it, to place it in the hands of another, is no more a personal right or a religious virtue than taking one's own gift of life in suicide for a religious motive
- to relinquish personal judgment and moral responsibility for one's own actions is the act of a deluded person, not the self-giving of patriotism, nor an authentic expression of religious obedience

Yet, Fran, we all know that the Vatican II document on The Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, —perhaps no longer appropriate—, still asks that superiors make the ultimate decisions and take responsibility for inferiors. This leads me to the fourth force pushing me to a feeling of greater responsibility for the Church and for religious life: those paradoxical, both wonderful and terrible documents of Vatican II. With careful reading one can discern those passages where a few liberal and a few conservative bishops sat down together to hammer out a section and found that the only way that they could get anything accomplished was by splicing their contradictory opinions together! So, here goes my thinking on this problem, the last I'll have time for in this letter:

#### **FOURTH, CONTRADICTIONS AND AMBIGUITIES IN CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS**

Regarding the above topic, Fran, let me illustrate what I mean. Even in the face of the world-wide discrediting of blind obedience, —of persons renouncing their personal responsibility in decision-making to superiors or administrators, the document on The Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life continues to approve and affirm:

- X-Y, **SUPERIOR—INFERIOR** relationships in sisterhoods with the necessary accompanying pyramidal authority structure
- renunciation of a sister's own will and judgment to the superior's
- assumption by superior of the moral responsibility for the subject's actions if in conformity to the superior's orders
- limited participation of sisters in decision-making through minimal participation structures such as consultation and hearings, but not through dialogue toward consensus as is prescribed by the Pauline theology on the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian Community

And here, Fran, for your convenience, are the document excerpts at issue:

In the work of appropriate renewal, it is the responsibility of competent authorities alone, especially in general chapters, to issue norms, to pass laws, and to allow for a right amount of prudent experimentation. (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1:4)

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit religious submit themselves to their superiors whom faith represents as God's representatives, and through whom they are guided. (*Ibid.*, 1:14)

Therefore, in a spirit of faith and love for God's will, let religious show humble obedience to their superiors in accord with the norms of rule and constitutions. [4th stage motivation] (*Ibid.*, 1:14)

Then, Fran, as though to reassure sisters who have been reading studies about the damaging impact of **TOTAL INSTITUTION** and other dominative patterns on persons and personalities, the document continues with this beautiful double-talk or outright contradiction of sociological and psychological research:

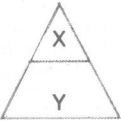

Lived in this manner, religious obedience will not diminish the dignity of the human person but will rather lead to maturity in conse-

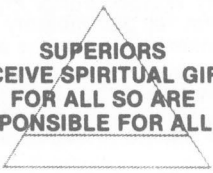

quence of the enlarged freedom which belongs to the sons of God. (Ibid., 1:14)

Well, it may indeed work for the "sons," but problematically for the daughters never mentioned. What I find most outrageously disconcerting, Fran, is the bunny-bounce involved, —reaching out the carrot of participatory decision-making with one hand, snatching it back with the other in consecutive sentences:

... a superior should listen willingly to his subjects and encourage them to make personal contribution to the welfare of the community and of the church. Not to be weakened, however, is the superior's authority to decide what must be done and require the doing of it. (Ibid., 1:14)

*Lumen Gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution On the Church, fills me with joy by its reemphasis of Paul's theology on the Holy Spirit, long smothered or ignored during the Constantian captivity of Church structures. By its frequent eclipsing of collegiality and respect for the equality of all sisters, *Perfectae Caritatis*, the *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life*, in contrast, is in seeming contradiction of Pauline theology. I can best show this contrast, Fran, graphically, as follows:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE CONSTANTIAN AUTHORITY MODEL</b></p> <p>(Preconciliar except in the document on religious life cited above)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE COLLEGIAL AUTHORITY MODEL</b></p> <p>(Conciliar, the reemphasis of the Pauline theology of community)</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—The Holy Spirit speaks <b>SELECTIVELY</b>; to superiors of religious institutes, to administrators of ecclesial bureaucracies</li> <li>—Conversely, the Holy Spirit seldom speaks to inferiors. They must hear God in the vocal vibrations of superiors</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—The Holy Spirit speaks <b>INDISCRIMINATELY</b> "... where it will, to the least as well as to the greatest, to persons of every rank for the upbuilding of the Church." (Paul, I Cor. 12:11)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—The Church is composed of <b>SUPERIORS</b> and <b>INFERIORS</b> ranked in hierarchical order and <b>NOT</b> of equals</li> <li>—The ecclesial superiors alone can discern what the Church must believe and do. They are to make decisions and see to it that they are enforced</li> <li>—If <b>INFERIORS</b> obey blindly they can do no wrong. Even if the superior is in error, the inferior cannot err if he has, in religious obedience, relinquished his decision-making rights to his lawful superiors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—"... equals as brothers (and sisters) for whom Christ died." (Romans 14:15)</li> <li>—"The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy Spirit (cf John 2:20,27) cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when, 'from the bishops down to the last member of the laity' it shows universal agreement (collegial consensus as at the Council of Jerusalem, Acts 15) in matters of faith and morals." <i>Lumen Gentium</i> 2:12</li> </ul>

CONSTANTIAN AUTHORITY MODEL (Cont.)	COLLEGIAL AUTHORITY MODEL (Cont.)
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>SUPERIORS RECEIVE SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR ALL SO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL . . .</b></p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Religious submit themselves to their superiors whom faith presents as God's representatives, through whom they are guided in service of all their brothers in Christ. <i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> 1:14</li> <li>—Let religious show humble obedience to their superiors. <i>Ibid</i> 1:14</li> <li>—For his part, as one who will render an account for the souls entrusted to him, each superior should himself be docile to God's will. . . <i>Ibid.</i> 1,14</li> <li>—The above quotation included reference to Heb. 13:17 as confirmation of the superior's responsibility for souls confided to his authority. Heb. 13:17 reads: "Obey your leaders and follow their orders. They watch over your souls without resting, since they must give an account of their service to God." —not the follower's service</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>ALL MEMBERS OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY RECEIVE SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR ALL SO SHARE IN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COMMON GOOD</b></p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—The heritage of this people are the dignity and freedom of the sons (daughters) of God in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. <i>Lumen Gentium</i> 11:9</li> <li>—In his/her activities a person is bound to follow conscience faithfully . . . The social nature of man itself requires that he should participate with others in matters religious. <i>Document on Religious Freedom</i> 1:3</li> <li>—It is completely in accord with the nature of faith that in matters religious every manner of coercion on the part of men should be excluded. <i>Ibid.</i> 1:10</li> <li>—God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He, Himself created; man is to be guided by his own judgment . . . <i>Ibid.</i> 1:11</li> <li>—Successful renewal and proper adaptation cannot be achieved unless every member of a community cooperates. <i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> 1:4</li> <li>—Let chapters and councils faithfully acquit themselves of the governing role given them; each should express in its own way that <b>ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY</b> have a share in the welfare of the whole community and a responsibility for it. <i>Ibid.</i>, 1:14</li> </ul>

Fran, that the *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life* is preconciliar in its mentality and ecclesiology, in parts, and needs to be rewritten or viewed as problematic is also illustrated by its contradictory message on **EGALITARIANISM**:

... care must be taken to produce in women's congregations a single category of sisters. Then there will be retained only such distinctions between persons as is demanded by the diversity of the works for which sisters are destined by the special call from God or by particular aptitudes. (1:15)

Thus the document seemed to be instituting or recommending a directional change in sisterhoods, —a movement . . .

**FROM**

**TOWARD**

—**FROM** there being two or three different social levels in the sisterhoods:

—**TOWARD** there being one level of sisters distinguished only by their diversity of works:



Parish Visitors  
nurses, students, housekeepers  
teachers, cooks, social workers,  
convent bookkeepers, pastoral  
associates, convent  
coordinators, etc.

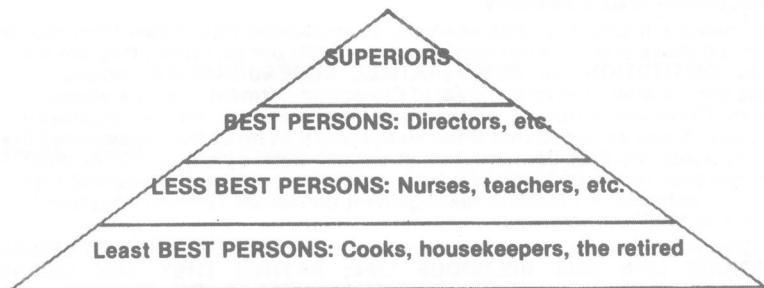
—**FROM** classism and elitism

—**TOWARD** egalitarianism

Fran, what a delightful recommendation! But then, two paragraphs later in the document comes this attention grabber:

“It also devolves upon **SUPERIORS** to see to it that the **BEST PERSONS** are chosen for directors, spiritual guides, and professors . . .”

So, Fran, my happy circle symbolizing equality in community has to change back to the pyramid with its hierarchical layering:



This elitist terminology in the *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life* really turns some people off, Fran, and the reality of the classism involved is so contrary to most of the conciliar documents and to the New Testament that one wonders how Christian leaders can so carelessly shunt aside Paul’s teachings on the fundamental equality in Christian community where there are divisions according to service roles but not by class and rank:

God has so adjusted the body, giving the greatest honor to the inferior parts, that there may be no discord in the body that members may have the same care for one another. (1 Cor. 12:24)

What I call the Bunny Hop or the **JACK RABBIT SYNDROME** is so pronounced in this particular decree that it amazes me that its many authors did not see what any college freshman in sociology sees in the compromise statements. Fran, in just those few sentences of the decree, 1:4, religious life is described in the vocabulary of four different organization models:



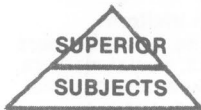
The Patriarchal Model

→ “Governing his subjects as God’s own sons, and with respect for their human personality, a superior will make it easier for them to obey gladly. . .”



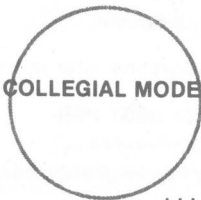
The Bureaucratic Model

Let him give a kind of leadership which will encourage religious to being an active and responsible obedience to the offices they shoulder."



The Monarchical Model

"The superior should listen willingly to his subjects and encourage them to make personal contributions to the welfare of the community and the Church . . . Not to be weakened, however, is the superior's authority to decide what must be done and to require the doing of it."



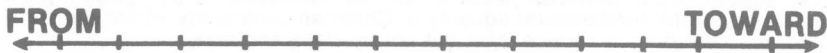
"Successful renewal and proper adaptation cannot be achieved unless every member of the community cooperates."

. . . A Glorious note to close on, Fran. Your loving sister, Clara

**CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY**

In Chapters II and III of this analysis, a conclusion was drawn from the data presented that sisters are not leaving religious life *per se*; rather, they are leaving **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** or **DEMOCRATIZED BUREAUCRACIES** instead. Young people are not alienated by the ideal of Christ-commitment; they are alienated only from Christ-commitment within person-suppressing, formal organizations. Therefore, it was assumed that if the sisterhood pattern of the consecrated life is to survive into the 21st Century, it must denude itself totally of **TOTAL INSTITUTION** and even modified forms of it such as the democratized bureaucracy toward which consultants in business management convinced renewal chapters in the 1960's and 1970's to retool.

In Chapter V we close with a corollary conclusion: **SISTERS ARE NOT LEAVING RELIGIOUS LIFE QUA RELIGIOUS LIFE; RATHER THEY ARE LEAVING PRECONVENTIONAL AND CONVENTIONAL STAGES OF SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT.** Only to the extent that a religious congregation is, itself, through dominative structures or law-oriented socialization, fixating members at the fourth stage of maturation, will sisters be forced to leave in search of **SIXTH STAGE SISTERHOODS.** For sisters of the world are on the move . . . journeying



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—FROM resocialization programs</li> <li>—FROM symbol-visible convent living</li> <li>—FROM authoritarian modal personality types</li> <li>—FROM a traditionalist orientation</li> <li>—FROM conventional level formation and fourth stage fixation</li> <li>—FROM complacency and conformity to the <i>status quo</i> in Church structures as willed by God</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—TOWARD continuous <b>BECOMING</b></li> <li>—TOWARD home world penetration</li> <li>—TOWARD egalitarian ideals</li> <li>—TOWARD openness to change</li> <li>—TOWARD postconventional level <b>BECOMING</b> and sixth stage maturation</li> <li>—TOWARD 21st Century <b>CONFRONTATION</b> roles courageously but respectfully disclaiming all dominative patterns within the Church and society</li> </ul> |
|---|--|