

**CHAPTER 2 - THE SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF
CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS AS
CHARISMATIC SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

*Fidelity to the spirit of the founder [or foundress]
and responsiveness to critical and unmet human needs
are basic to the ongoing mission of religious
communities¹.*

Religious life can be described as a social movement which has existed 'in many different religious traditions and in a wide variety of forms' (Schneiders, 1986, p.26). It currently understands its own history as a succession of eras, each marked by distinctive innovation in life-style². During such transitions, religious life undergoes a 'paradigm shift' which causes 'revolutionary changes'. This model of historical development is similar to that advocated by Thomas Kuhn for understanding the history of science³. It differs from Kuhn's, however, by not claiming a complete break from one era to the next. New congregations are seen as maintaining some of the characteristics of the old and, of course, many of the old congregations obviously continue to exist, and even to thrive, in the new era⁴.

This model has assisted contemporary theologians and sociologists to propose and explain the current transition stage they believe religious congregations are experiencing worldwide. While only a model, and reality tends to burst through its boundaries, it currently dominates the literature. It helps this study, by conceptualising, first, the context into which the Marist Brothers' social movement was born and, second, the history and present problems of that Marist movement.

¹ This conclusion to a major study on the future of religious life in the United States published in September 1992 is quoted in Fagan (1992, p.1299).

² The books describing these eras have been either read, or the ideas discussed, by most members of religious congregations today. Information about such research trickles down into a widespread consciousness among religious through conferences, retreats, journals and everyday conversations.

³ Kuhn understood the history of science as going through a period of normal science (growth phase in the religious life model), then a period of gathering crisis (decline phase) leading to a period of extraordinary science (change-over phase) that issues in a new paradigm and a new period of normal science under new rules (growth phase under a new image).

⁴ Such as adherence to the distinctive character of each congregation as exemplified by the Benedictines returning to the spirit of St. Benedict.

2.1 - HOW THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IS UNDERSTOOD

Fleming initially (1971), and Cada *et al.* more recently (1985), have described what they see as a repeated sequence of identifiable phases of change in the history of religious life.

Growth Phase. A relatively long period which starts with the emergence of a new dominant image of religious life and continues with the elaboration and development of that image. The growth phase peaks in a golden age during which the dominant image of religious life successfully unites a large number of religious communities in its area.

Decline Phase. A period of ambiguity in which the dominant image of religious life comes under questioning. Religious communities seem no longer suited to the aspirations of the age. The communities lose their sense of purpose, drift into laxity, and disintegrate.

Change-over Phase. A comparatively short period in which religious life passes through one of its major turning points in history. In the midst of a considerable amount of turmoil, variations of the dominant image of religious life crop up. Certain of these variations are fused into a new dominant image.

Growth Phase under a New Image. A period of elaboration and development under the new dominant image ... which inaugurates the next great age in the history of religious life (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.12).

This now well documented model (Fitz and Cada, 1975, Chittister, 1983, Cada *et al.*, 1985, Schneiders, 1988, Byrne, 1989, O'Murchu, 1980 and 1989, Wittberg, 1991) divides the history of religious life into five main eras.

(1) The Age of the Desert (200 - 500) Religious life in the Christian tradition began in the deserts of Syria and Egypt where men and women went to do battle with the devil (O'Murchu, 1989, p.68). By the year 315, Pachomius, sometimes referred to as the father of the religious life, had charge of five thousand monks in Egypt (Byrne, 1989, p.18). The desert was seen as a place of austere beauty, where the monk was trained in the ways of perfection. He returned periodically to heal the sick, cast out demons, comfort the sorrowful, encourage the persecuted, reconcile the estranged and urge everyone to put nothing in the world before the love of Christ (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.15). During the fourth century the 'allure of the ascetic ideal' came to be felt also in the West with foundations emerging on the Italian peninsula, in Gaul and Spain, and along the northern coast of Africa. By the fifth century, the golden age was

beginning to fade. Many monks in the East had become involved in doctrinal controversy. Monasteries in Gaul and other parts of the West became refugee cloisters, where monks gathered together the few treasures of civilization they could find in the aftermath of barbarian pillage. Asceticism began to lose its appeal. Many wondered if religious life would die out along with the Roman empire.

However, as dusk settled on the ruins of imperial Rome, the stage was already being set for the rise of feudal Europe and the next age of the evolution of religious life. Out beyond the frontiers of the crumbling empire Celtic monasticism was quietly taking root in far-off Ireland, unnoticed by the bewildered leaders back in the besieged centers of Christianity and the civilized world.

During this first age, the basic patterns of religious life emerged. Most of these have remained normative to today (Cada *et al.*, 1985, pp.15-20).

(2) The Age of Monasticism (500 - 1200) This Age was dominated by the image of the monk or nun spending a lifetime in a single monastery or abbey observing the rule.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, European convents and monasteries observed a variety of such rules, the most important of which were the various versions of Celtic discipline. At the same time, Benedict's more temperate approach began its gradual expansion ... and emerged as the dominant pattern from the ninth to the twelfth centuries (*ibid.*, p.28).

Benedict knew the wisdom of the desert and carefully extracted from its many traditions those which he thought most applicable to the religious life which would be led amid the unsettled conditions of sixth-century Italy.

This image was not only a correction of the abuses which had crept in during the decline of the Age of the Desert; it also, and more importantly, turned out to be a successful adaptation of the ascetic ideal to the feudal society which emerged from the Dark Ages and reached its crest in the early medieval period (*ibid.*, p.23).

Benedict's rule combined an 'uncompromising spirituality with physical moderation and flexibility. It emphasized the charity and harmony of a simple life in common under the guidance of a wise and holy abbot'. When the sixth century began, the vision of religious life contained in Benedict's Rule was just one 'among a great variety of regimes, which varied in austerity, thrust, and rigour of observance' (*ibid.*). Benedict's rule

was gradually adopted by other monasteries. Charlemagne's son, Louis, sought to reform monasticism, which was becoming corrupt in some centres, by decreeing that Benedict's rule be observed by all the monasteries of his realms (O'Murchu, 1989, p.71). This unification did not take effect until the monastery at Cluny began its growth in the tenth century.

Cluniac ideals became the model for Christian spirituality, the Cluniac network was used to bolster papal strength, and the Cluniac system of more than a thousand monasteries prefigured the structures of a religious order of later centuries (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.24).

But by the end of the eleventh century, the Cluniac network had become vast, wealthy, and, to some, a source of scandal, despite various attempts made to restore the primitive fervour of the Benedictine ideal, chief among which were the Carthusian and Cistercian reforms. During the twelfth century European monasteries, which had been so successful in the ways of feudal culture, began to appear inadequate to the Age of the early Crusades, the beginnings of world trade, and the contacts being made with Arab civilisation and, through it, with the classical learning of antiquity. Laxity was once again creeping into religious life. A particular issue was that those monks who were priests began to feel superior to those who were laymen. This dispute gradually led to the almost complete clericalization of the monks and the relegation of the residue of male lay religious to a subordinate monastic category. This was not to be settled (and then only briefly) until the next century with the rise of the mendicants (*ibid.*, pp.24-25). The Age of Monasticism had successfully provided the commitment methodologies needed for religious congregations to survive after the deaths of their charismatic founding people. But now, religious life was seeking once more to adapt to the new conditions of Church and society (Wittberg, 1991, p.29).

(3) The Age of the Mendicant Orders (1200 - 1500) The mendicant ideal of Francis and Dominic pulled together some of the variations that had arisen in the previous century and united them with the main objectives of religious life. Renouncing personal ownership had always been espoused, but the mendicants provided a fresh example of what it could mean to be evangelically poor by divesting themselves of landed wealth and living off alms. This allowed them, in addition, an apostolic mobility which had previously been incompatible with the ideal of monastic stability. The

mendicants provided a new and effective way for the Church to teach and preach, which in previous centuries had been seen as the responsibility of the secular clergy (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.29 and p.31).

At the time of their birth, church life generally was in a state of some disarray. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council ruled:

Lest the extreme diversity of Religious Orders lead to confusion ... we firstly prohibit anyone else to found a Religious Order. But whoever wishes to enter the Religious Life, let him [or her] join an Order already established. Similarly with anyone wanting to set up a new Religious house, let ... [that person] choose a rule and form of life from among the approved Religious Orders (quoted in O'Murchu, 1989, p.73).

Dominic acknowledged this directive and adopted the Rule of St. Augustine while giving it an orientation which established a new rule in practice for the Dominicans. Francis, however, continued to insist that the only Rule he wished to adopt was the gospel message of Jesus. His 'new' rule was approved by Pope Honorius III in 1223 (*ibid.*).

Rapid expansion occurred among the Mendicants. While the majority of religious in the thirteenth century still belonged to monastic orders, their growth was not as great. The new image of religious life gradually became acceptable, and proved to be a better way to serve the emerging urban society than was possible from monasteries in isolated rural settings. Particularly worth mentioning is the fact that, during the course of the thirteenth century, the monastic orders began to establish *studia* close to the new universities.

As Christendom reached its zenith, the image of a new kind of religious life ... played a key role in the Church's spirituality, the cultivation of the intellectual life of the Church and society, and ... the preaching of the gospel for the Church (Cada *et al.*, 1985, pp.31-32).

In time, however, the mendicants, 'who had been founded in reaction to the decadence of monastic wealth, succumbed with even greater flair to the same evil'. Half way through the fourteenth century large numbers of religious died in the black plague. Those who died were often the 'more pious and devout religious', because it was they who went into the towns and cared for people burdened by the disease.

As the Renaissance brought a new humanism and the secularization of European society, and various other

movements hinted at the coming breakup of Christendom, a malaise was clearly descending upon the Church and religious life ... Once again it seemed that the time was ripe for a new regeneration and revitalization of religious life (*ibid.*, pp.32-33).

(4) The Age of the Apostolic Orders (1500 - 1800) By the sixteenth century, European society was being transformed. Rationalism was emerging, the New World had just been discovered and the Church was held in low respect (*ibid.*, pp.33-34). Luther, Calvin and other Protestant reformers rejected the idea of religious life, which by this time, had lost its credibility (McDonough, 1992, p.91). Vatican authorities 'received proposals that all but four orders of men and most orders of women be suppressed' (Sammon, 1992, p.66). As some European countries became Protestant, their catholic religious congregations were almost eliminated (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.34).

By the first half of the sixteenth century, two new foundations, the Ursulines and the Jesuits, had begun a new trend. From the very start, the Jesuits pursued the ideal of excellence for the sake of God:

excellence in sanctity and holiness, excellence in the intellectual life, excellence in apostolic zeal, whether it concerned extirpating the heresies of Protestantism to regain the wayward flock, or carrying the message of faith on missionary journeys to the very antipodes' (*ibid.*, pp.33-34).

The intense personal formation of the Jesuits in disciplined pursuit of holiness allowed these new militant servants of the Pope to do without the safeguards of regular monastic observance.

Ignatius broke with the spiritual tradition which measured holiness by the amount of time spent on one's knees. His contemplatives were to prove themselves in action ... Once the will was purified, closeness to God could be measured rather by service of one's brothers and sisters. The goal was 'to find God in all things' and, as a corollary, 'all things in God' (TAB, 1990, p.1183).

Consequently, immersed in the exercise of individual meditation, the Jesuits took up the challenge of the Reformation, 'shoring up the Church's political power in Catholic Europe', preaching the gospel in newly discovered lands, and 'coming to grips with the secularizing trends of the scientific revolution, modern philosophy, and the rise of nationalism in Europe' (*ibid.*, p.35).

Other visionary founding people like Vincent de Paul and Angela Merici of the Ursulines found ways of circumventing the decrees of the Council of Trent which imposed cloister on all nuns and punished violations of cloister with excommunication. Of the early Daughters of Charity, Vincent de Paul famously wrote:

They are to have no monastery but the houses of the sick, who have for cells only a lodging or the poorest room, whose chapel is the parish church, who have the streets for cloisters. They are enclosed only by obedience; they make the fear of God their 'grille', and they have no veil but their own modesty (quoted in O'Murchu, 1989, p.75).

Such orders saw personal holiness as the only dependable agency of reform (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.35). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries more women found ways of carrying out their ministry without being confined to the cloister (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.36). These groups gave birth to female apostolic religious life, 'one of the most powerful and creative resources the church has ever known' (O'Murchu, 1989, p.75). But, like earlier eras, this one also came to show signs of decline.

During the eighteenth century, a slow decline began in religious life. Large but nearly empty religious houses could be found almost everywhere in Europe. The Enlightenment undermined the rationale for religious life, and many liberated religious seemed to agree with this new thinking (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.37).

The Bourbon kings persuaded Rome to suppress the Jesuits in 1773. 'Many orders passed out of existence - some were suppressed by the state, while others simply closed down after the majority of their members had departed' (*ibid.*, p.38). Astonishingly, of the approximately two thousand Benedictine establishments in Europe in 1789, twenty were still functioning in 1815 (Sammon, 1992, pp.66-67)⁵. Some predicted the demise of religious life as a whole, but it seems that the way was being cleared once again for its revival in a new form (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.38).

⁵ 'On the eve of the French Revolution, worldwide membership in all the men's religious orders stood at approximately 300,000; by the time the Revolution and the secularizations which followed had run their course in France and the rest of Europe, fewer than 70,000 remained' (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.38).

(5) The Age of the Teaching Congregations (1800 - Present) The fifth era of religious life began with a century of social change, commercial and industrial expansion and colonialism. Six hundred congregations were founded in the nineteenth century - including the focus of this study, the Marist Brothers. The majority of these congregations were dedicated to the ideal of building educational and medical institutions where their members applied themselves to 'attaining the professional standards required for excellence in those institutions'. Humility and simplicity became the hallmark virtues for these religious who dedicated their lives to developing their institutions to an acceptable standard in secular terms and at the same time shape them to suit the needs of the Church.

The most widespread instance of this strategy was the enlistment of religious communities in the movement of educating the masses. For the first time in European history, the idea of educating everyone had the possibility of being realized. The new congregations joined in this movement in ... [the hope] of planting the seeds of a robust faith in the souls of the children they taught (*ibid.*, pp.39-40).

Enthusiasm for the education of children, together with the new spirituality of the seventeenth century, helped inspire the new-style religious. While many now worked in hospitals, most took up teaching.

Even the few pre-Revolution orders which were managing a slow recovery took on many of the trappings of the typical nineteenth-century teaching congregation. For the first time in the history of religious life, recruitment of adult vocations was almost completely displaced by candidates just emerging from childhood (*ibid.*).

Religious life took this new turn because the Church saw it could get in touch with large numbers of people using these institutions (*ibid.*). 'Development was lateral rather than progressive' (Byrne, 1989, p.71). Whereas the seventeenth-century Jesuit education aimed at the elite, nineteenth-century teaching congregations focused on the masses. Both kinds of education strove to support the Church's ordinary ministry.

Religious still saw themselves as bishops' specialized auxiliaries working at the tasks that the secular clergy could not handle in its ordinary parish ministry. The difference in the nineteenth century lay in the large role played by women and the value ascribed to humble and devoted service by individuals willingly and generously submerging

themselves to the ends of apostolic institutions (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.41).

By now the feudal structures, common in religious life since the dawn of Europe, were finally discarded. Instead of each religious establishment being 'a benefice to which a guaranteed fixed annual income was attached', congregations had to find new means of support. The governments of the nineteenth century avoided state support of religious orders 'because of the success of those ideas of the Age of Reason which dictated that the only legitimate role of religious was secular service to society'. This pattern

turned out to be a blessing in disguise, since it meant that the apostolic method which Vincent de Paul and John Baptist de la Salle had experimented with on a limited scale in the seventeenth century was now adopted across the board (*ibid.*, pp.41-42).

Prior to the French Revolution, religious orders were well endowed and well financed. People wondered whether such orders would ever inspire the faithful again by their poor lifestyles. After the Revolution, religious orders had no choice. 'The means of security in the past had been taken away, never to be returned, and the demands of day-to-day living forced a poor lifestyle on the new congregations'. As this era developed, increasingly professional religious were staffing a vast network of Catholic institutions in developed countries and those emerging in new lands. By time of the Second Vatican Council, the number of religious had reached its highest point ever in absolute terms (*ibid.*).

Today, religious life is seen to be in a period of transition. Pivotal to this transition is the crisis of significance that followed World War II and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1964) (Schneiders, 1986, p.87). The Council's discussion and document on the Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis* (1965)) came at an early stage of the transition period⁶. It saw the appropriate renewal of religious life as involving two simultaneous principles, one conservationist and one contemporary:

(1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community and

⁶ Though as early as 1950, for example, the Sacred Congregation of Religious 'held international convocations of the major superiors of monastic, contemplative and active congregations, in which they were urged to adapt their institutes to the modern world without sacrificing the essentials of their state of life in the Church' (Schneiders, 1991, p.157).

(2) an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times⁷ (PC, 1965, p.468).

The Council asked each religious institute to renew its life in response to the signs of the times⁸, according to the norms of the Gospel and in harmony with the charism of the particular congregation⁹ (Schneiders, 1986, p.87).

Yet, since the 1970s, there has been a sharp decline in membership of religious congregations due to increased withdrawals and a decrease in new members (Collins, 1991, p.61). This decline has caused many members to experience alienation and question the relevance of their congregations' basic charisms. A recent study indicated a 'larger relative number of resignees among those already established in church careers than in any other equivalent period of time since the French Revolution' - the decline phase of the last era of religious life (Wittberg, 1991, p.33 and p.48). For example, in the United States, membership in women's religious congregations decreased 33% between 1966 and 1983 while men's orders declined 14% with the greatest loss being among brothers (38%) as compared to priests (1%)¹⁰. Specific ministries have lost religious at a greater rate. In 1983 there were 68% fewer women religious teaching in Catholic schools than in 1966 (Neal (1984) quoted in Wittberg, 1991, p.34; Schweickert, 1991, p.222).

Following the Council, the Church began to open itself to a world which was undergoing dramatic secularisation. This opening up

⁷ The Council further elaborated certain principles which it saw as guiding the renewal of religious life 'under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church':

- a) ... a following of Christ as proposed by the gospel ... is to be regarded by all communities as their supreme law.
- b) It serves the best interests of the Church for communities to have their own special character and purpose. Therefore loyal recognition and safekeeping should be accorded to the spirit of founders [and foundresses], as also to ... [the] goals and ... traditions which constitute the heritage of each community.
- c) All communities should participate in the life of the Church ... [each according] to its individual character ... [in] scriptural, liturgical, doctrinal, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary, and social [fields].
- d) Communities should promote among their members a suitable awareness of contemporary human conditions and of the needs of the Church.
- e) ... an interior renewal must always be accorded the leading role even in the promotion of exterior works (PC, 1965, pp.468-469).

⁸ To this programme O'Reilly, speaking from his African context, adds the need for religious congregations to respond to the 'signs of the places' (1991, p.869). Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* claimed the three main 'signs of the times' to be (1) the end of colonialism (2) the emancipation of women and (3) the promotion of the lot of the working class (TAB, 1992k, p.1216).

⁹ Some would say that Vatican II helped the Church deal not so much with the 20th century, but with centuries of needed reform (Slattery, 1992, p.15).

¹⁰ Schweickert (1991, p.222) quotes the following statistics:

	1963		1986
Priests	58,000		57,183
Brothers	12,000	7,429	
Sisters	177,000		113,658

(*aggiornamento*) had significant impact on all dimensions of Church life. Parishes and their schools ceased to be alone in shaping the values and beliefs of Catholics. Once-clear norms and social roles within the Church no longer served their original purpose (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.47). One early commentator observed: 'Religious watched the pendulum swing from an overly institutional conception of vowed life during the pre-conciliar period, to an overly individual conception of the vows during the period directly after the Council' (Rosato, 1977, p.282).

The first indications of new life, yet another era of religious life perhaps, may be discernible in twentieth century movements such as those of Taize where pilgrims, having passed the ruins of the Cluny abbey, arrive to pray and live in a less formal setting¹¹ (Byrne, 1989, p.8), the Brothers and Sisters of Charles de Foucauld¹², the Sisters and Brothers of Mother Teresa, the Basic Christian Communities of Latin America and the vast array of Christian communities springing up across the world (O'Murchu, 1989, p.79).

New life is also observable, it is suggested, in a number of established religious congregations which have extended their choice of activities and gone from a religious place of work to a secular place, and 'from charitable activities to activities implying solidarity with movements for the liberation and progress of humanity' (Tillard, 1986, p.17).

In summary, therefore, the historical evidence is read - with considerable plausibility - as showing that there have been significant shifts in the dominant image of religious life over the centuries. These shifts have often occurred during major changes in society and Church. Each major shift is heralded by some significantly new foundations which embody a new image, initially not perceived as being 'real' religious life (Wittberg, 1991, p.26).

¹¹ The personal charism of Brother Roger, the founder and leader of the Taize community, centres on 'his Gospel simplicity, his depth and his transparency'. Daneels describes the Brothers who live at Taize as 'silent and discreet, undemonstrative, entirely turned toward God and open to every guest' (Daneels, 1992, p.26). Taize celebrations include prayer, songs and long periods of silence. Few words are spoken and there is no preaching.

¹² The Little Brothers of Jesus, inspired by the French mystic Charles De Foucauld, were founded in 1933 by Rene Voillaume and four other priests who settled on the edge of the Sahara and adopted a monastic way of life based on Charles de Foucauld's first rule (Livingstone, 1990, p.147). Today they number 250, work in 45 countries and have their world headquarters in a terraced house in Brixton, London (Willey, 1992, p.1097). The Little Brothers seek to combine contemplation with the discipline of earning their living (Livingstone, 1990, p.443). They live in small communities among the poor, 'working in factories and coal mines, on farms and fishing boats, as taxi-drivers and dustmen'. The Little Sisters were founded six years later, and now have 1,200 members (Willey, 1992, p.1097).

Many communities go out of existence at each transition. Those which survive, contemporary scholars maintain, either continue in a diminished form or adapt the new dominant image to the charism of their own foundation. The mendicant orders, for example, grew stronger numerically during the Age of Apostolic orders because they adapted their own gifts to the new style of religious life. The evidence suggests another major transition has now begun. If it follows earlier patterns, it will last twenty to twenty five years and significantly change religious communities and their works into a new form of religious life (Cada *et al.*, 1985, pp.45-47; Leddy, 1989, p.47).

2.2 - THE INDIVIDUAL CONGREGATION: HISTORY AS LIFE CYCLE

Just as religious entertain and draw upon a sense of the history of religious life generally along the lines outlined above, so they draw also upon a sense of the history of their own particular institution or order. And, increasingly in the present time of crisis, they tend to see this particular history in terms of a 'life-cycle' model.

The French Jesuit, Raymond Hostie (1972) initially developed this model to describe the typical religious congregations. I was only able to study the French edition of Hostie's text in the New York City Public library. An English edition is available from the Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Washington D.C. (O'Murchu, 1989, p.267). O'Murchu says of Hostie's framework:

The theory is not without its limitations: it makes many generalisations; it is based on a number of unproven assumptions and is modelled exclusively on male Orders and Congregations. Nonetheless, it carries a ring of truth and makes sense of historical developments that otherwise remain disconcerting and even baffling ... I first began to study the history of Religious life in the early 1970s; I was unaware of Hostie's work ... I myself came to the same conclusions ... The subsequent research of ... Cada and associates (1978) endorsing these historical findings with sociological evidence ... further enhances Hostie's theoretical framework (1989, pp.65-66).

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to offer a critique of the life cycle model. It receives a great deal of support from current authors¹³ and it has entered into the self-understanding of many contemporary religious. On that basis, I present the following discussion of this theory. It relies on the work of Marianist Brother Cada and his associates (1985) and Diarmuid O'Murchu (1989), a priest member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Congregation. It is particularly relevant to the Marist Brothers' Congregation. During the last two decades, the Brothers have been moving from a period of confidence where many worked together in schools, and when the Congregation's numbers were increasing, to the current period where many Brothers work in more individual apostolates, where the overall number of Brothers is declining and the average age of the Congregation's membership continues to increase. These changes affect Brothers' work in both quantitative and qualitative ways. There are now fewer Brothers in schools and each Brother chooses his work more specifically according to his own talents. These changes naturally affect contemporary Marist educational vision. According to the life cycle model of religious congregations, the Marist Brothers' Congregation is in the 'breakdown period'. We now examine this model in some detail.

In his 1972 study, Hostie insisted religious congregations

have a hardy life. They need a period of gestation from ten to twenty years. To consolidate, they need almost double that time. Their full development, if not postponed by a period of incubation, takes almost one hundred years. They remain stabilised during an almost equal period of time. Then suddenly they begin a downward curve, which in its turn can last from fifty to one hundred years, after which, according to circumstances, extinction is duly registered ... The completed life-cycle of groupings of Religious Life stretches out over a period varying between 250 and 300 years¹⁴ (Hostie (1972) quoted in O'Murchu, 1989, p.66).

In building on Hostie's model, Cada *et al.* identify five consecutive periods in the typical life cycle of a religious congregation.

(1) The Foundation Period. This period centres around a founding person and his or her vision. This vision results from an unmerited religious experience or series of experiences of depth and intensity in the founding person's life (Roccasalvo, 1992, p.562).

¹³ Of the 10 to 15 discussions I have studied, none has been substantially critical.

¹⁴ Religious congregations which have lasted longer than 300 years are considered to have been 'refounded'.

Contained in the transforming experience is a new appreciation of the message of Jesus which leads to innovative insight concerning how the condition of the Church or society could be dramatically improved or how a totally new kind of future could be launched (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.53).

A new impetus to fully live the religious life is felt, and a new theory emerges that is 'a critique of the present, an appropriation of the past, a compelling image of the future, and a basis for novel strategies'. Then follows a 'fortuitous encounter' between the founding person and some contemporary men or women in which the 'founding experience, innovative insight, emerging theory, and call to holiness are shared'. The founding person guides the group in developing new arrangements for living the gospel together and working toward the realisation of the Reign of God (*ibid.*, pp.53-54).

The foundation period lasts some twenty to thirty years, and frequently coincides with the last part of the founding person's lifetime (O'Murchu, 1989, p.66; Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.54). The community structure begins to appear in seminal form with authority emanating from the wisdom of the founding person who usually displays a 'unique combination of charismatic attractiveness and practical ability' writing the constitutions which codify the founding vision 'only after ten or twenty years' experience' (Wittberg, 1991, p.27).

While the foundation period focuses on the founding charism there are also crises to be faced.

The crisis of direction forces the community to decide which undertakings are important ... The crisis of leadership confronts the community with the problem of finding out how it will live beyond the time of its founding person. The crisis of legitimization involves the nascent community with the questioning of whether the Church will approve it as an authentic form of religious life (Cada *et al.*, p.54).

2) The Expansion Period. Following the foundation period, the congregation undergoes at least a fifty year period of expansion, during which the founding charism is institutionalised. As the congregation's second generation members grow older, they recount stories of the foundation which 'enshrine decisive events' and establish the community's direction and characteristic ways. Gradually, rituals and symbols which commemorate the 'most treasured facets of the foundation' are 'fused with

the lore of the older members' into a sacred memory and cult that begins to be passed on from generation to generation as the community's 'founding myth'.

Attempts are made at thinking through the founding myth and expressing it in terms of contemporary thought patterns. Eventually these efforts result in theories, interpretations, and social models which coalesce into a belief system and give a rational structure to the more intuitive thrust of the founding myth (*ibid.*, p.55).

Simultaneously, procedures for decision making and communication are established. 'Norms are set down and customs emerge which cover all aspects of the community's life, such as membership criteria, leadership standards and apostolic priorities.'

The members of the young community experience an excitement about the growth and success that characterize the expansion period. Large numbers join the community, and new works are rapidly taken on which enhance the possibility of a still broader recruitment. Major interpreters of the founding vision are recognized. Patterns of spiritual practice are determined, and the community's spirituality is made concrete in manuals of direction or other written documents (*ibid.*, pp.55-56).

With expansion arises the organisational questions as to how authority will be delegated, what means will be used to integrate and link the rapidly expanding membership and network of establishments and how the vigour of the founding vision will be maintained (*ibid.*, p.56).

(3) The Stabilisation Period. This may last for a century or more (O'Murchu, 1989, p.67). While an increase in membership may continue, geographical expansion usually slows down. The congregation continues to enjoy a feeling of success. The prevailing paradigm of religious life is clear giving a foundation for describing 'unambiguous social roles for religious'.

Gradually, as stabilization sets in ... [there] is little need to elaborate the understanding of the founding vision or penetrate into it more deeply. It is simply accepted, and repeated to new members. No one is left in the community who knew the founding person or the first disciples personally. Memory of the founding events takes on the cast of past history that is separate from the present moment. Formation of new members emphasizes their conformity to standard patterns of external behavior that are

seen as the best means of cultivating interior commitment (Cada *et al.*, 1985, pp.56-57).

Activism begins to dominate, work-satisfaction displaces the centrality of Christ, members tend to be carried along by the inertia of the community's activities rather than by deep personal commitment. Vision and commitment among members become less intense, now that the community has become so highly institutionalised. Basic myths and beliefs are presumed. A feeling of overall well-being rules out the necessity for change, and a hidden type of rigidity begins to set in (*ibid.*, p.57 and p.87). 'This is the phase in which wealth begins to accumulate, poverty becomes problematic and prayer-life recedes into the background' (O'Murchu, 1989, p.67).

(4) The Breakdown Period. Eventually the apparent immutabilities of the stabilisation period begin to give (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.57). Breakdown may be a gradual process lasting up to fifty years, or may take place quite rapidly in a matter of a few decades.

Institutional structures and belief systems dismantle, giving way to widespread doubt and stress. This phase originates in a minority's dissatisfaction with the internal life of the group or the relevance of its external commitments. The idea of going back to the time when things were going well is an illusive dream (O'Murchu, 1989, p.67).

Decision making structures become confused, membership decreases and internal abuses spread (*ibid.*). Members begin to question the importance of belonging to one religious congregation rather than another. The crisis of collapsing institutions sets in as the community is forced to abandon long-established works. The resulting demoralization suggests the community's impending death (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.59 and p.87).

(5) The Transition Period. Any one of three outcomes is possible:

(a) Total extinction: Historically this has happened to 76% of all male Religious groups founded before 1500, and to 64% of those founded before 1800. This suggests most of today's religious congregations will become extinct (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.59).

(b) Minimal survival. A religious community that doesn't die out may go into a period of low-level survival which can last for several centuries. Of all male groups, only 5% of all men's orders founded before 1500, and 11% of the orders founded before 1800 have a current membership larger than 2,000 (*ibid.*).

(c) Revival. A small percentage of religious congregations survive the transition period. Three characteristics can be attributed to congregations which have been revitalised in this way: first, a transforming response to the signs of the times - 'those various events and movements' in the world that reflect 'God's presence and purpose' (Dwyer, 1992, p.17); second, a reappropriation of the founding charism and third, a profound renewal of the life of prayer, faith and centredness in Christ¹⁵ (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.60; Sammon, 1992, p.72).

The time in history when revitalization occurs makes a difference to its form. If the revitalization takes place during one of the shifts in the dominant image of religious life, the congregation appropriates many of the characteristics of the emerging paradigm, and a transforming response to the signs of the times becomes central.

Personal transformation ... is central to revitalization. With personal transformation comes innovative insight ... [which] brings with it a focusing of energies through a new positive vision of what the community should be in the future. The vision allows the emergence of a new theory which gives meaning to the experiences of individuals and the shared events lived with the community, and spurs the community to building and creating its future (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.60).

The Ursulines provide an example of revitalisation which occurred during the shift from the Age of Apostolic Orders (1500 - 1800) to the Age of Teaching Orders (1800 - present) (*ibid.*, p.61).

TABLE 2.1 - THE URSULINE SISTERS AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE REVITALISATION OF A RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION

FIRST CYCLE		
1535 - 1565	Foundation	30 years
1565 - 1690	Expansion	125 years
1690 - 1790	Stabilisation	100 years
1790 - 1820	Breakdown	30 years
SECOND CYCLE		
1820 - 1840	Revitalisation	20 years
1840 - 1900	Expansion	60 years
1900 - 1960	Stabilisation	60 years
1960 -	Breakdown	18+ years

If the revitalisation occurs midway during one of the major eras in the history of religious life, the revitalization takes on the characteristics of a

¹⁵ Although current authors refer to sociological research to back up such contentions, it seems that they still rely mainly on the work of Raymond Hostie.

reform, with the reappropriation of the founding charism playing a central role. In either case, this new theory guides the congregation in its search for, or invention of, a new model of serving the world as a community of disciples (*ibid.*).

PREFACE TO 2.3 AND 2.4

We now consider some of the doubts, debates and exciting new ideas that characterise the culture of religious life in the late 20th century. MacIntyre stresses the importance of such debates:

... when an institution - a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital - is the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices, its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is. Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean¹⁶, it is always dying or dead (1990, p.222).

While many debates on the nature of religious life focus on such questions as to whether congregations can be 'refounded', as suggested by Arbuckle in his book *Out of Chaos* (1988), or simply 'reweaved', as proposed by Leddy in her text *Reweaving Religious Life* (1991), the pivotal issue in current discussions is the meaning and role of charism. In the next two sections, we consider, first, how members of religious congregations understand the theology of charism and, second, how they apply this theology to contemporary religious life.

2.3 - THE THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHARISM

Studying the theology of charism as it pertains to religious life emerged after the Second Vatican Council. Like all theology, it is based on a reading of Scripture and tradition. In defining charisma as a certain quality of an individual personality by which the person 'is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (1978, p.241), Weber acknowledged a certain conceptual link between charisma and the supernatural. Theology¹⁷, which relies on revelation, takes this link for real (Hodgson, 1992, p.1229).

¹⁶ Burke equates nature 'with certain established norms and procedures, including the procedure of relying on prevailing habit rather than on argument (MacIntyre, 1989 p.228).

¹⁷ Theology is defined by St. Anselm (1033-1109) as 'faith seeking understanding' (Hill, 1988, p.36) and by St. Thomas Aquinas (1226 - 1274) as 'reason led by the hand of faith' (Davies, 1974, p.101).

The Second Vatican Council described the primary and perpetual foundations of theology as the written Word of God and tradition. It saw the study of Scripture as the soul of theology and a source of nourishment for Christian instruction, and tradition¹⁸ as the handing down of understandings which have resulted from the contemplation and study made by believers since the time of Jesus (DV, 1965, Art.4 and Art.24). Scripture and tradition, together with reason, provide essential resources for considering the theology of charism¹⁹ (Avis, 1992, p.115).

In the Hebrew Scriptures, special people were designated by God's Spirit and anointed to lead the people. In choosing these people, God provided them with the inspiration, or charism, needed for the task. Thus Perkins describes the early leaders of the tribes of Israel²⁰ as charismatic (1990, p.24). The Spirit moved these people to actions beyond their known capacity - such as when delivering Israel from its enemies²¹. Saul was moved by the Spirit to deliver the city of Jabesh-gilead²², threatening all those who did not follow him with severe punishment (Hengel, 1981, p.19).

In normal times the loose organization of the tribes of Israel needed no more than the simple government of clan and village elders. When the peace of Israel was threatened by external enemies, this leadership was not enough, and it was supplanted by the leader who demonstrated the possession of the spirit by the deeds of the spirit. During the period of the judges, the spirit of the charismatic leader was a passing phenomenon: the spirit came upon the leaders during the emergency, impelled them to a mission, and departed after the mission was accomplished²³ (McKenzie, 1991, p.1290).

The king, on the other hand, was a permanent charismatic officer, as signified by his anointing when the Spirit was conferred²⁴. Hence, at David's anointing the Spirit passed to him from Saul²⁵.

Once the idea was established that the spirit reposed permanently upon the king, there was less frequent mention

¹⁸ The Vatican Council saw tradition developing with the help of the Holy Spirit (DV, 1965, Art.8).

¹⁹ Cada et al. conclude that although 'Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Hans Kung and other theologians have made substantial contributions to the explication of the theology of charism, a comprehensive study remains to be done' (1985, p.164).

²⁰ These leaders were called 'judges'. Saul and David were two examples.

²¹ cf. Judg 3:10, 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14.

²² cf. 1 Sam 11:6,13.

²³ cf. Judges 8:8).

²⁴ cf. 1 Sam 10:10.

²⁵ cf. 1 Sam 16:13.

of the spirit in the narratives about the king; and extraordinary actions in the manner of the judges were not attributed to the kings after Saul (*ibid.*).

The king became regarded as the guardian of the status quo, upholding the power structure (O'Murchu, 1989, p.52). Hengel believes charismatic following and discipleship were found more frequently where traditional order and its standards were repeatedly broken down or rejected outright, than in established Judaic and Greek institutions (1981, p.34).

In the New Testament, we observe that Jesus was charismatic in the sociological sense.

He was exceptional and set apart; endowed with supernatural or superhuman qualities ... He attracted and retained his followers not on the basis of traditional legitimacy or status, but by virtue of his innate qualities and the sense of the divine and numinous that emanated from him. Like a true sociological charismatic, Jesus was detached from the everyday concerns and responsibilities of human life. He forsook family and home, just as he taught his followers to do; he had nowhere to lay his head. He made no provision for the future, teaching his disciples not to worry about what they would eat or what they would wear. He undermined social conventions, especially cultic conventions. Though apparently cautious and reserved about his miraculous signs, he did not deny that they testified to his extraordinary source of authority. It is typical of the charismatic that he is opposed as vehemently as he is supported: to his opponents, Jesus had a devil and was guilty of blasphemy (Avis, 1992, p.71).

Yet, to the believer, Jesus was, of course, also charismatic in the theological sense which dominates the New Testament: He was clothed with the power of the Spirit. He was the Christ, the Anointed One (Avis, 1992, p.74; Suenens, 1992, p.1157). In moving from the sociological to the theological, we change from the purely phenomenological description of charisma to the theological evaluation of it. For Christians, Jesus really was endowed with an altogether unique charisma and He was aware of this.

[He] thought of himself as God's son and as anointed by the eschatological Spirit, because in prayer he experienced God as Father and in ministry he experienced a power to heal which he could only understand as the power of the end-time and an inspiration to proclaim a message which he could only understand as the gospel of the end-time (Dunn, 1975, p.67 quoted in Avis, 1992, p.71).

In recounting the baptism of Jesus²⁶, the synoptic writers recall how, when coming out of the water, Jesus 'saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him' after which 'the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness' (Mk.1:10-11). Once he left the desert, Jesus fulfilled his mission as a charismatic teacher standing outside any uniform tradition of Judaism. This caused Him to be described as a 'seducer' in contemporary Jewish circles. The Old Testament was no longer the central focus of His message and this distinguished him from both the prophets and the scribes of his day. Jesus' messianic charism was to look behind the Law of Moses towards the original will of God (Hengel, 1981, p.46, p.49 and p.70).

Paul, the former Pharisee and scribe and one of Jesus' greatest disciples, first introduced the actual term 'kharis' into theological literature and the tradition of the Church²⁷ (Hengel, 1981, p.51). Considered as a Greek word, it was lifted from 'referring to an earthly benefit to referring to a heavenly one', from signifying the favour, grace and goodness of one person to another, to signifying the favour, grace and goodness of God to each human person²⁸ (Hoerber, 1989, p.182). In his letters, Paul describes charisms as gifts of the Spirit - the Spirit of Christ²⁹, the Spirit of God's Son³⁰ and the Spirit that confesses the lordship of Jesus³¹ (Avis, 1992, p.73).

To one is given ... the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge ... to another faith ... to another gifts of healing ... to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor. 12:8-11).

This list is not intended to be exhaustive and precise definitions are impossible (Murphy-O'Connor, 1990, p.810). Paul sees these gifts as differentiating believing individuals from each other for the sake of enhancing their mutual service (Koenig, 1978, p.14). Every Christian has been granted at least one of these gifts³² (1 Cor.7:7).

²⁶ cf. Mt.3:13-17; Mk.1:9-11; Lk.3:21-22.

²⁷ Avis describes Paul's charismatic status as ambiguous (1992, pp.72-73).

²⁸ Kharis, for the first time in the New Testament, refers to 'the grace of the worthy to the unworthy, of the holy to the sinful' (Hoerber, 1989, p.182).

²⁹ cf. Rom.8:9.

³⁰ cf. Gal.4:6.

³¹ cf. 1 Cor.12:3.

³² 'What people instinctively choose manifests God's gift' (Murphy-O'Connor, 1991, p.804).

Each person is to realise the social character of his or her contribution and use it for the common good without envy or jealousy (Fitzmyer, 1990, p.863). Just as the human body needs different members (1 Cor. 12:14-20), so the church needs a diversity of spiritual gifts, with each one making a specific contribution (Murphy-O'Connor, 1990, p.810). Paul, however, sees some ministries as more important than others: 'And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues' (1 Cor. 12:28). While he distinguishes these spiritual gifts from the greater gifts of faith, hope and love, of which love is the greatest (1 Cor. 12: 31; 1 Cor. 13), Paul still advises his listeners to 'strive for the spiritual gifts' and especially the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1)³³. Prophets had an important role in the early Church. Prophets Judas and Silas 'said much to encourage and strengthen the believers' (Acts 15:32) and prophets generally were expected to interpret Christ's message to the world under the inspiration of the Spirit³⁴ (Arbuckle, 1988, p.91).

In the early church there were people who sometimes spoke with 'tongues' or 'unintelligible sounds of ecstatic excitement' and were the subject of some controversy (Chadwick, 1990, p.29). Paul found this phenomenon could be deeply divisive and, in reaction, emphasised the routine aspects of the charismatic community³⁵. He saw charism leading not only to tongues and prophecy, but to order, edification and service³⁶. Helpers and administrators are also listed among the charismatics³⁷ (Avis, 1992, p.73). Yet charism retained its place in the region of mere 'enthusiasm' and strange ecstatic phenomena (Rahner *et alii*, 1968, p.283). In the fourth century, when Jerome³⁸ was translating the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into Latin³⁹, he used the word dona rather than charismata in all but one case (Wiggins, 1992, p.50). The one exception

³³ In Ch. 14, Paul contrasts tongues with prophecy.

³⁴ Some scholars claim that with the coming of Christ the prophetic focus shifted from the individual to the community. In this sense, Jesus becomes prophetic not so much in His individual but rather in His Trinitarian identity. As a result, the reign of God depends on the prophetic community which Jesus sought to establish - a community which is marked by right and just relationships (O'Murchu, 1989, p.52).

³⁵ cf. 1 Corinthians 14 (Harris, 1992, p.1436).

³⁶ *taxis, oikodome* and *diakonia*.

³⁷ 1 Cor.12:28.

³⁸ c340-420.

³⁹ Jerome's work on the Latin version of the Bible, called the Vulgate, was carried out from c.383 to c.405 (North, 1990, p.722).

was in translating 1 Cor.12:31⁴⁰ where the word's context conveys the impression that charisms have to do only with the miraculous or extraordinary. This association prevails throughout the Christian church until modern times and has been passed on, via Weber, into the sociology of charisma (Cada *et al.*, 1985, pp.163-165).

We have already noticed Protestant theologian Rudolph Sohm for his influence on Weber. His exegesis of charisma in the 19th century focused on the notions of task⁴¹ and calling⁴². Charism is a gift of grace which calls a person to an activity, a call which a person cannot choose to accept or reject: 'Such a calling does not liberate, it limits by setting tasks. Here is no apostleship in the morning, fishing in the afternoon: a calling sets forth a service for a lifetime' (Haley, 1980, pp.193-194). Beyond that, Sohm believed the Church was wholly spiritual and law wholly secular. Consequently he saw the development of canon law as an abandonment of the primitive ideal of the Church, which he considered to be a fundamentally 'charismatic' body (Livingstone, 1990, p.480). In contradistinction to that view, in 1943, Pope Pius XII, in *Mystici Corporis*, affirmed the validity of 'the charismatic elements in the Church as balancing the hierarchic elements'. The documents of the Second Vatican Council contain fourteen passages in which the word 'charisma' or 'charismatic' appears, but 'little is said about the interplay of charismatic and institutional elements in the everyday life of the Church' (Cada *et al.*, 1985, p.164). Pope John Paul II, however, is on record as warning that a 'charism cannot provoke rebellion or the rupture of unity' for if it does 'it is not authentic or not being used in the right way' (TAB, 1992f, p.878). In sociological terms, the authority the Church exemplifies is to some extent 'traditional' and traditional authority is currently on the defensive - as evidenced by the British monarchy. The trappings may remain, but 'the justification of office has subtly changed its ground from status to role'⁴³. Authority is acceptable when it is exercised competently.

For the believer, however, that is not the whole story. For him or her the Church today remains a Spirit-bearing body, a messianic community in which the risen Christ dwells in His Spirit. The originating charisma of the New Testament community has become routinised, 'trapped

⁴⁰ '[but] earnestly desire the higher gifts.'

⁴¹ *Aufgabe*.

⁴² *Beruf*.

⁴³ 'Role, but not status, is acceptable, provided that it is a role sanctioned by the prevailing canons of society - and that means the utilitarian criteria of productivity and efficiency' (Avis, 1992, p.59).

in the channels of the everyday, mundane structures of human sociality'. But the Church's structures, the channels of routinised charisma, only represent the outward life of the Church. Schleiermacher⁴⁴ distinguishes this outer life from the inner life of the Church which is constant and unchanging - a life he describes in terms of the consciousness of God through the mediation of Christ (Avis, 1992, p.74). Schleiermacher believed religion to be based on intuition and feeling and independent of all dogma, with its highest experience occurring in a sensation of union with the infinite, a feeling of absolute dependence (Hinnells, 1984, p.287; Livingstone, 1990, p.462). This notion of Christian consciousness of the intimate presence of God enriches our understanding of charism and emphasises its theological sense (Avis, 1992, p.75).

Charism today is seen as signifying 'the call of God, addressed to an individual, to a particular ministry in the community, which brings with it the ability to fulfil that ministry' (Kung, 1976 quoted in Boff, 1990, p.158). It is always subject to 'the laws of human psychology, a person's character, previous experience and theological knowledge. There are no purely divine experiences of grace; there are only "incarnate" spiritual experiences' (Rahner, 1977, p.72). The distinctive charisma of Christianity involves self-emptying, self-sacrifice, suffering in solidarity with all victims of human hurt or natural affliction and doing the will of the Father. This, Christians believe, leads to justice, truth and love, but not without suffering. It was only when the disciples saw Jesus' wounds, that He finally breathed His Spirit on them⁴⁵ (Avis, 1992, p.83).

2.4 - CHARISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

We now turn to the different forms of charism relating to vowed religious life. Few contemporary Church leaders realised the importance of language⁴⁶ more than Pope Paul VI who was painstaking, even scrupulous, in his selection of words. It was he who introduced the vocabulary: 'the charism of religious life' and 'the charisms of the founders [of religious communities] who were raised up by God within his Church' (Lyne, 1983, p.25; Buckley, 1985, pp.60-61). The Second Vatican Council had prepared

⁴⁴ Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was defending religion against the rationalism of the Enlightenment (Hinnells, 1984, p.287).

⁴⁵ John 20:20-22.

⁴⁶ Contemporary philosophy and modern hermeneutics have insisted that 'words have an effect like architecture'. 'With architecture you build the buildings, and then the building you live in builds you. Similarly with language, you introduce terms into a discussion, and the language you admit either expands your perception of the issues or it hopelessly limits it' (Buckley, 1985, p.60).

the ground for this stage of theological development, but it was Paul VI who brought it into articulation and existence (Buckley, 1985, p.61).

Lyne (1983, p.18) describes three levels of meaning of the word 'charism' as it applies to religious life. First, it can apply in the general sense of an ideal type, existing in the church, the charism of the religious life. Second, it can refer to a particular religious family or congregation as it exists in its concrete historical reality, the charism of a congregation or an institutional charism. Third, it can refer to an experience of personal faith and the response given by an individual Christian - a personal charism. If this person is a founding person of a particular religious congregation, then his or her charism may be described as a founding person's charism.

Paul VI describes the charism of the religious life as 'far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world', but rather the fruit of the Holy Spirit (1971, p.12). It is 'the Spirit alone who takes the initiative in the experience that leads a Christian to choose this type of life ... such an experience lies beyond the rational'. While over the centuries religious life 'has embodied a definable essence - common life, according to a rule, under a superior, and, in the case of apostolic religious, a corporate apostolate' (Duggan, 1992, p.1128), it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church⁴⁷, but springs directly from a Christian and gospel based life lived in the world (Azevedo, 1988, pp.136-137). Nor is it an intermediate lifestyle between the clerical and lay states (PC, 1965, Art.43). It has its own essence. Being under charismatic authority, religious life is inherently unstable, unlike traditional and bureaucratic authority structures which enjoy permanence (Avis, 1992, p.67)⁴⁸. Men and women who choose to join the religious life publicly consecrate their lives to God binding themselves to live the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience⁴⁹. These three evangelical counsels, which are based on the words and example of Jesus Christ, become the law of existence for members of religious congregations (PC, 1965, Art.43; Paul VI, 1971, p.9). Prayer is central to the charism of the religious life. Paul VI insists that if religious are humbly

⁴⁷ This is documented in *Lumen Gentium*. Many members of religious congregations are of course also priests, and as such part of the hierarchy.

⁴⁸ Today there are 930,000 (93%) women religious and 67,000 (7%) lay men religious in the Catholic Church (Beaulieu et al., 1991, p.9).

⁴⁹ Today the term 'celibacy' is preferred to the term 'chastity' for this vow because of the relevance of chastity to all married and single life (Bell, 1992, p.1047).

attentive to the needs of people and things, the Spirit of Jesus will enlighten them and enrich them with His wisdom provided they are imbued with the spirit of prayer (ET 1971, para. 44). Religious orders are founded for the purpose of ministry and not for the sake of the members. 'If the ministry is still serving a genuine need, or is still a relevant proclamation of the word of Jesus, then people will join through a natural process. If they do not, it says something about the relevance of the ministry' (Collins, 1991, p.62).

O'Murchu describes religious life as a form of liminality which both 'clarifies the structure of society and can be instrumental in changing it'. When society creates its own liminal groups, often unconsciously, it projects onto them its 'deepest hopes, dreams and aspirations' and requests the liminal group 'to embody and articulate, for society at large, the deepest values this society holds dear and sacred' (1989, pp.37-38). Those who founded religious congregations were normally 'breathtakingly radical' and consequently their followers today tend also to breathe a radical spirit and minister in a prophetic way (TAB, 1990, p.1183). The Edict of Constantine⁵⁰ was, for the ascetics, a sign that Christianity had given into the world. Ascetics of the time saw the Church beginning to be absorbed by the State which, O'Murchu believes, caused religious life to spring up as a protest movement seeking to articulate and promote 'pure' Christianity (1989, p.20). This protest element has remained an integral part of the religious life experience in all its different cultural expressions (O'Murchu, 1989, p.20). To break new ground is part of the charism of religious life (O'Mahoney, 1990, p.4).

Comment [SHCS1]:

Arbuckle claims it is possible to refound religious congregations. He defines refounding as 'the process whereby a religious community struggles to relate the Gospel message to the most persistent and urgent needs of the times'. This process assumes a congregation has 'a clear and accurate vision of itself and its mission' and 'creative individuals who are willing and able to draw others to live the vision in concrete and relevant ways' (1991c, p.702). The charism of a refounding person is an extraordinary gift of the Spirit (1988, p.89). Such a gift can be accepted or refused both by the individual congregation and the refounding people within those congregations. Arbuckle sees a refounding person as one who 'acutely sees the contemporary chasm between the Gospel and secularizing cultures' as did the founder or foundress of the particular congregation, one

⁵⁰ 313 AD.

who tries to bridge this chasm while at the same time, summoning others to do likewise (*ibid.*). This refounding person is a prophet 'because he or she has the same ability as the founding figure, shares the same vision and is driven by the same burning desire to preach the Gospel of the Lord' (*ibid.*, p.91). Reading the signs of the times, however, is a prophetic challenge requiring a critical evaluation of what is oppressive, manipulative, consumerist and unjust. The prophet must then 'enable, empower and energise people to rise above their human and spiritual plight' acting as 'the catalyst who continually questions the underlying assumptions, the strategic values of the status quo and proposes (dreams) new and better ways of serving people'. Such a visionary task involves sensitivity and imagination rather than rational linear thought (O'Murchu, 1989, p.52). McDonough warns that charisms cannot 'be humanly built by "refounding" or personally manufactured by "reweaving"⁵¹. They are gifts received, embraced, and lived - with receptive and responsive elements indispensable to their basic reality - or they are not true charisms at all' (1991, p.185).

Leddy, in an incisive and challenging critique of present trends in religious life, claims most religious congregations have adopted a liberal vision of religious life since the Second Vatican Council. This has often resulted in the following outcomes:

- 1) Vision statements which are sufficiently general to include all the various interests in a congregation (1989, p.41). These 'global, carefully crafted, blandly diluted statements' can hardly be opposed in theory and scarcely assessed in implementation (McDonough, 1991, p.176). Rarely, Leddy contends, do they 'compel passionate generosity and energetic self-sacrifice' (1989, p.44).
 - 2) Difficulty in making choices for long term planning because there is no deeply shared vision (*ibid.*, p.45).
 - 3) Emphasis on the personal growth of individual members. Community is then seen in terms of the needs of the members, work as an individual project and spirituality as a private concern (*ibid.*).
 - 4) The virtual impossibility of sustaining corporate commitments (*ibid.*).
- Leddy believes liberal communities are currently being held together by an agreement, stated or unstated, to do the minimum together (*ibid.*, pp.46-47).

In most women's institutes, general chapters have now abandoned legislation in favor of direction-setting ... lower-level superiors are now either nonexistent or nonfunctional, while major superiors have abandoned government in favor

⁵¹ cf. Leddy, M. (1989) and (1991).

of business management and have surrounded themselves with middle-level, appointed, administrative personnel whose numbers have steadily increased ... in bureaucratic disproportion to the continuing decrease in membership (McDonough, 19991, p.172).

O'Murchu (1989, p.55) sees a prophetic vision as a congregation's greatest gift, a 'powerhouse of energy and vitality' which is frequently articulated through prophetic people inside or outside the congregation, men and women who allow the Word of God 'to become so much of themselves' that 'they speak the message and values of Jesus' (Slattery, 1991, p.3). A congregation is fortunate when it can welcome a new orientation, accommodate it in appropriate structures and allow it to call forth its members - often along unwanted paths (O'Murchu, 1989, p.55).

When congregational members work together under the inspiration and motivation of a shared vision, leadership is a quality that they all begin to exercise. 'The vision of what the community is capable of and desirous of striving for draws on and focuses the collective energy and talent of the members of the community' (Starratt, 1990, p.102). Yet a common social vision cannot be imposed. Such a vision, which is 'more than the sum of the private dreams of the individuals who call themselves a community' arises through the creative, rather than the coercive, use of power⁵² (Leddy, 1989, p.43 and p.49). It comes from 'the deepest level of our lives, from the level where our communion with God coincides with our community with others' (*ibid.*, 1991, p.98).

O'Murchu sees the paradigm for the emerging era of religious life as based on the rediscovery of the theology of the Reign of God - 'inaugurated in our world by Jesus, a lifestyle marked by right relationships of justice, love and peace'. In this paradigm the church exists in both the Kingdom and the world, and religious life exists at the points of intersection where the Reign of God and world meet.

We Religious are intended to be Kingdom-spotters; our vocation is to be Kingdom people. We belong to both church and world, to the here and hereafter; and yet, we are invited to transcend all these ... categories as we respond to the supreme prophetic task of *advaita*: the recreation of life in the depth and unity of the One who holds all things in being (1989, pp.ii-iii).

⁵² 'The coercive use of power is a characteristic pattern of an empire in the state of decline' (Leddy, 1989, p.43)

The juxtaposition in Chapters 1 and 2 of certain sociological and theological literatures has been fruitful enough to suggest they might learn much from each other. Further development of that point must be for others, however. The purpose of this thesis is to identify components of the vision of the Marist Brothers' Congregation - a Congregation of educators who seek to promote the Reign of God. In Chapter 1 we identified sociological concepts and perspectives useful to our task. The burden of this chapter is that in clarifying their vision, Marist Brothers need to take into account the current transition period of the religious life social movement, the present position of the Congregation in its own life cycle and current understandings of the theology of charism. But it is a central part of the specific religious charism of Marists that they are educators - so their religious vision must be at the same time an educational vision. In the next chapter we turn to some social movements whose members are directly involved in schools to see the ways they develop and live their educational visions.

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