

# A REFLECTION ON THE CHARISM OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

*Loan Le*

**I**N HIS APOSTOLIC LETTER to ‘all Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life’, Pope Francis invited religious to reflect on the life they have been given to live.<sup>1</sup> In response to this invitation I would like to explore the thought of the Dominican theologian Jean-Marie Roger Tillard on charism in relation to religious life. Tillard was a significant participant in the developing theological conversation, before and after Vatican II, about questions relating to the nature and function of religious life in the life of the Church. His contribution, as he said, was not ‘to say anything new, but rather to emphasize one essential aspect: how religious life exists at the very heart of the mystery of the Church’.<sup>2</sup>

For Tillard, the nature of religious life cannot be studied outside the context of Church. Therefore I shall start from his ecclesiology. As he wrote,

When the Holy Spirit quickens religious families and personal vocations, he makes them all part of his general aim for God’s People. Their charism is a charism of the Church, given by the Church, for the Church. Their specific mission represents, in fact, but one facet of the mission of the whole Church. And since the Church is born of the communion of various local churches, each retaining its specific features and having its own particular needs, the charism and mission

<sup>1</sup> Available at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacrati.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacrati.html), n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, ‘Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church’, in *The Mystery of Religious Life*, edited by R. F. Smith (St Louis: Herder, 1967), 3. This article first appeared in French as ‘La Vie religieuse dans le mystère de l’église’, *Sciences Ecclésiastiques*, 14 (1962), 89–107. It was then translated into English by M. Susanna and published in *Review for Religious*, 22/6 (November 1963), 613–633.

of religious cannot find their fulfilment elsewhere than in the tasks and undertaking of the very concrete Christian environments in which these communities choose to implant themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Given that Tillard believed the charism of religious institutes to be granted for the Church, how does he understand that charism? I shall begin by outlining Tillard's thought on charism generally and move on to how Tillard relates the concept of charism to religious life in particular.

### ***Tillard's Notion of the Term 'Charism'***

Tillard acknowledges that the term 'charism' has provoked some confusion. In his book *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, he briefly clarifies that the adjective 'charismatic' relates to grace and spiritual experience: the Greek prefix *charis* signifies grace. With reference to the writings of Paul the Apostle, he adds that 'charisms' denote the gratuitous gifts of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> For Tillard, the term encompasses a broad range of personal spiritual experiences, as well as states of life: as he says, 'Paul has given to the married state the name of charism, just as he does for the celibate state'.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, particularly in his examination of Paul's writings, Tillard discovers that charism is not just a gift for the benefit of the community but also a gift for the believer's personal relationship with the Lord:

Paul does use the word charism in a way that instantly evokes a pause to contemplate the inner experience. In particular, he does so in 1 Corinthians 7. There the fact of being *agamos* (unmarried) is indicated as a charism (1 Corinthians 7:7). The context shows that what makes this gift of the Spirit meaningful is not primarily its usefulness to the community but the believer's personal relationship with his Lord (see also 7:32–34).<sup>6</sup>

When commenting on the so-called charismatic renewal movement of his time, Tillard affirmed that 'for the great majority of its followers, the charismatic movement simply expresses a sincere desire to renew the inner life, and more particularly the experience of God'.<sup>7</sup> But when 'the

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'The Paths of Obedience', *Lumen Vitae*, 31/3–4 (1976), 282.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms: The Religious Life*, translated by Olga Prendergast (Brussels: Lumen Vitae, 1977), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde: le projet des religieux* (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 147.

<sup>6</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 16.



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charismatic renewal movement presents itself as an absolute', its followers might involve themselves in a kind of experience of spiritual enthusiasm to which everything else had become subordinated.<sup>8</sup> In their desire to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church's life, certain groups within the movement introduced confusion and even misrepresentation in relation to the terms 'charismatic' and 'charism'.

Among such groups, these terms were essentially 'linked with an extraordinary manifestation of gifts, attributed to the outpouring of the Spirit: glossolalia, interpretation, prophecy, healing' and miraculous phenomena. Tillard objected to this orientation. Associating charismatic experience only with such manifestations was, for him, 'an extraordinarily myopic view'.<sup>9</sup> If the terms were given their true meaning, the charismatic life and the experience of the Spirit were considerably broader than the usage of these groups implied.<sup>10</sup> Tillard was firmly convinced that charisms do not just consist of extraordinary experience, nor are they necessarily exclusive or astonishing. Rather, they are all the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are bountifully given to all the baptized. As he states,

<sup>8</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 13–15.

Every authentic Christian life is a life in the Spirit and fully charismatic, even without glossolalia, prophecy, interpretation or any other extraordinary gift. Every Christian eucharistic assembly is charismatic, even when there is no external manifestation of the outpouring of the Spirit. Every Christian prayer is a prayer in the Spirit, even without the enthusiasm of a communicative experience. And I venture to add that every Christian suffering lived in Christ is charismatic, even if it is not the object of healing.<sup>11</sup>

However, Tillard did believe that there was a valid role for enthusiasm in the domain of spiritual experience. He proposed two ways of interpreting enthusiasm in relation to religious matters. On the one hand, ‘like artistic enthusiasm—which has been compared to an intoxication that carries man far away from the rational and the normal—religious enthusiasm, if not kept under control, can lead to the worst excesses’. This kind of enthusiasm is associated with fanaticism and all kinds of illuminism, and at times borders on insanity. On the other hand, when rooted in a genuine experience of the divine, religious enthusiasm is ‘the mainspring of those bursts of inspiration which restore to mankind its sense of the transcendent and its thirst for God’.<sup>12</sup> This is ‘the enthusiasm born of an experience of the Spirit’.<sup>13</sup>

Concerning this latter enthusiasm, Tillard distinguished between two levels. The first level is what he called a ‘wholly personal and inward’ experience, that is, ‘the person experiences God’s power filling him, he feels that he is being seized by the Spirit and urged to place his living strength under the power of the Spirit’. It is an experience of faith, for an enthusiasm that comes from the Spirit must needs be one that is grounded in faith. This is the sense in which Tillard applies the term ‘enthusiasm’ when developing his argument on the charism of religious life. The second level is ‘more external’. That is, the person feels an encounter with the Spirit through extraordinary phenomena and gestures such as glossolalia, prophecy, ecstasy, thaumaturgy and the gift of healing. Tillard observes that these phenomena, which are found in all religions, are not in themselves typically ‘evangelical’.<sup>14</sup> In some excessive cases they may

<sup>11</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 37.

even demonstrate traces of an extreme trust in the value of human effort or self-satisfaction.<sup>15</sup>

For Tillard, genuine charisms need to be recognised and discerned. He considers love to be an essential characteristic. Reflecting on St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13, he writes,

The Christian criterion in this domain is neither the quantity nor the extraordinariness of the individual or collective experience, but the quality of the love of God and mankind that surrounds the experience.<sup>16</sup>

Supernatural phenomena and spiritual gifts cannot be acknowledged as genuine charisms unless they actualise love for God and neighbour. Furthermore, a genuine charism will lead people to praise and service. As Tillard says, 'the charism has to transcend the level of experience confined to the person or the group—including all the joy and peace one may derive from it—and lead on to the service of the Lord's glory'. He emphasizes that charisms are not predominantly ecstatic but doxological—giving praise to God. 'They are not primarily a privilege but a service (1 Corinthians 12:5–7).'<sup>17</sup> Praising God and serving God and God's people are the expression of authentic charisms.

Significantly, Tillard believes that love, praise and service will find their expression in the result of *koinonia* (communion) which is 'the essential fruit of the Spirit'.<sup>18</sup> According to him, the desire to praise God and serve others cannot find itself in exclusiveness. He observes that those who form coterie that are more fascinated by the ecstatic experience than by love can cause unease and a disturbed atmosphere in the community, and where such coterie exist in a community the Lord's Spirit is not at work. Attitudes that undermine the spirit of *koinonia* do not come from the Spirit of God. Tillard's concept of charism can be interpreted as a gratuitous gift of the Spirit given for the benefit of the community but also, and above all, for the believer's personal relationship with the Lord. Born of an experience of the Spirit, charisms are seen as spiritually linked to an enthusiasm grounded in faith. They are the gifts of the Holy

***The kind of love that leads to praise and service***

<sup>15</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 37–41.

<sup>16</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 25.

Spirit bountifully given to all the baptized according to their state of life. Genuine charisms will be signified by the kind of love that leads to praise and service expressed in *koinonia*, an essential fruit of the Spirit.

### ***Tillard on Charism of Religious Life***

Tillard believed that the Christian life is innately related to the Spirit and that ‘every authentic Christian life is a life in the Spirit and fully charismatic’, whether it be lived in the single, married or religious state.<sup>19</sup> The question then arises as to what distinguishes the charism of religious life from other charisms in the Christian community. Tillard starts from the premise that religious life is a state of life within the Church whose primary component is a relationship built on faith and expressed in a charismatic call and a charismatic response. I will look more closely at the three elements making up this premise: religious life as a state of life in the Church; charismatic call as a primary component of religious life; and charismatic response as a primary component of religious life.

#### *Religious Life as a State of Life*

Tillard centres his teaching on religious life in the theology of *koinonia*. Through baptism, believers are initiated sacramentally into communion with God and, at the same time, into the life of the Church—sharing

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<sup>19</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 15–16; Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *Religieux aujourd'hui* (Brussels: Lumen Vitae, 1972), 55; Tillard, ‘Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church’, 21–25.

in the mystery of the 'communion of life' with the Father and with others in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Although it is made up of sinners, the Church is always holy, because it belongs to God, who alone is holy. This is 'where the drama of the Church is situated': it is holy in God's love, but sinful through human weakness.<sup>21</sup> The reality is that Christians live in a state of tension as they follow the call to 'the perfection of charity and hence of communion' in the midst of the demands and responsibilities of their state of life.<sup>22</sup>

It is through its sacraments and different states of life that the Church offers its members the means of responding to their particular call.<sup>23</sup> For each and every person, this call 'consists in living according to the charism' they have received.<sup>24</sup> While none of the states of life constitutes perfection, they provide a pathway to evangelical perfection in whatever way the Spirit leads a person to that goal.<sup>25</sup> Tillard defines religious life as 'the tending towards perfection'.<sup>26</sup> He writes,

But the perfection of what? Quite simply, of the Christian life. Because he wants to realize the mystery of charity perfectly, that is to say in the terms we have been using the mystery of communion of life with God and with one's fellow men, the religious is not content merely to observe the precepts; he freely and generously binds himself to the narrow way which leads to the keeping of the evangelical counsels; for the sake of this he cuts himself off from everything that could place an obstacle between himself and God ... he binds himself to a *state* of perfection. The word 'state' implies stability and in this case stability that implies an entire lifetime.<sup>27</sup>

For Tillard, religious life does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church but takes its source directly from the Holy Spirit. The initiative for this life does not normally come from within the hierarchy

<sup>20</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 4–5.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'Religious Life, Sign of the Eschatological Church', in *The Mystery of Religious Life*, 61–63. This article was also published in *Review for Religious*, 23/2 (March 1964), 197–206.

<sup>22</sup> Tillard, 'Religious Life, Sign of the Eschatological Church', 63–66; Tillard, 'Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church', 15.

<sup>23</sup> Tillard, 'Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church', 23.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *A Gospel Path: The Religious Life*, translated by Olga Prendergast (Brussels: Lumen Vitae, 1977), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, 147.

<sup>26</sup> Tillard, 'Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church', 8.

<sup>27</sup> Tillard, 'Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church', 8–9.

but from the faithful, the People of God. This point, Tillard insists, is fundamental. Here, the action of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the domain of the sacramental and hierarchical. It is essential to emphasize this.<sup>28</sup> Inspired by the Holy Spirit, religious life is a particular way of living the communal experience of grace in the kind of generous response that is never satisfied with itself. Rather, it aims to move the heart to a more solid commitment in a special and vigorous way, in light of the totally mysterious dimension of the Christian experience. Normally it appears because a person, seized by the Holy Spirit, joins with other brothers and sisters to seek the Lord together in a particular state of life.<sup>29</sup>

Tillard finds this state of life is essentially 'characterized by the three vows ... and the practice of common life'.<sup>30</sup> However, he cautions that its members do not 'make vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity to add new dignity or to graft a new function upon what Christian initiation has written in the very depths of [their] being'.<sup>31</sup> The vows are merely a means to permit the baptismal life to reach its full flowering.<sup>32</sup> One becomes a religious not for the sake of the vows, but for the sake of the gospel. He writes,

Although the vows represent elements that are specific to the religious life, and therefore indispensable to whoever feels called to that life by the Holy Spirit, they are not the primary elements in the concrete life of grace of the religious. They aim to liberate the Christian in order to lead him gradually to the heart of the Gospel's demands.

The vows and common life are thus 'specific elements', but not 'primary elements', of religious life. Regrettably, says Tillard, 'people tend to confuse specific elements with primary elements'.<sup>33</sup>

This raises the question of what the primary elements of religious life are. After thoroughly researching its history, Tillard found that, whatever form it has taken, religious life has always had 'a special

<sup>28</sup> Tillard, *Religieux aujourd'hui*, 56–58; see also Tillard, 'Religious Life, Sign of the Eschatological Church', 64; Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'Are Teaching Brothers Still Needed?' *Review for Religious*, 25/6 (November 1966), 1019–1022; Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'Religious Women and Pastoral Work', *Review for Religious*, 25/1 (January 1966), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Tillard, *Religieux aujourd'hui*, 56–57.

<sup>30</sup> Tillard, 'Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church', 21.

<sup>31</sup> Tillard, 'Are Teaching Brothers still Needed?', 1020.

<sup>32</sup> From his research Tillard discovered that the three vows did not exist at the beginning of religious life. They appeared in the twelfth century, long after the religious state of life had been well established. See Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, 121; Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 85, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 101.



feature'.<sup>34</sup> For Tillard it is no longer acceptable to say that this special feature is 'a higher degree of perfection or a more genuine "imitation" of Christ'.<sup>35</sup> Every baptized person is called to be perfect.<sup>36</sup> The special feature, he emphasizes, 'does not stem from a moral or ethical hierarchy but from an existential way of appropriating and living our common kinship with Christ'.<sup>37</sup> In other words, this is a question of living a special style of existence that enables one to embrace the whole of the gospel.<sup>38</sup>

From the gospel, Tillard distinguishes between two ways in which people may attach themselves to Jesus. The first is what he calls 'the usual way': they are called to live the evangelical life without abandoning their everyday life. The second is 'a special way', leaving their customary lifestyle in order to live the evangelical life in a more concrete and public manner.<sup>39</sup> Donald Maldari observes that 'without disparaging the "normal vocation", Tillard claims that the "special way" to follow Jesus literally required those disciples to adopt a radical attitude which the others did not'.<sup>40</sup>

For religious, this 'special way' seeks 'the one thing necessary', Jesus Christ—'he who suffices to fulfil what their whole life desires and yearns for'.<sup>41</sup> Compared with 'the one thing necessary', all the other things that a person might strive to obtain are relativised. Tillard emphasizes that, in choosing religious life, people no longer base their lives on what is relative, but on 'the one thing necessary'.<sup>42</sup> The foundation of this existence is the whole of the gospel charter seen from a radical perspective. Tillard likens the gospel to an isosceles triangle whose inverted apex represents the demands of the Sermon on the Mount. Not all Christians base their existence on those absolute demands.<sup>43</sup> While every Christian

<sup>34</sup> Tillard, 'Religious Life in the Mystery of the Church', 21. Tillard describes the various forms and the evolution of this state of life: 'the cenobitical life of St Pachomius in the fourth century, the monastic institution of St Benedict around the sixth century, mendicant orders in the twelfth century, congregations of clerks regular in the sixteenth century, institutes of simple vows in the following centuries. All of these show that diversity is no stranger to the religious state' (22).

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'Religious in the Workyards of Men', *Lumen Vitae*, 31/1 (1976), 85.

<sup>36</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Tillard, 'Religious in the Workyards of Men', 86.

<sup>38</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Donald C. Maldari, 'The Identity of Religious Life: The Contributions of Jean-Marie Tillard Critically Examined', *Louvain Studies*, 14 (Winter 1989), 329; see Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *Les Religieux aux coeurs de l'église* (Montreal: Institut de Pastorale, 1967), 11; Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'Sequela Christi', *Spiritual Life*, 18 (1972), 76–80; Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, 153–169; Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 19–26.

<sup>41</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 22; see also Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, 193.

<sup>42</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 24–25; see also Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'Le Fondement évangélique de la vie religieuse', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 91 (1969), 933–953.

is called by the Spirit to witness to the Kingdom and to serve it in various ways, religious locate their life

... in a state where everything that can be required of every baptized person on certain occasions, becomes for [them] the daily norm, and [they centre their] entire existence on the perception of this transcendent and demanding value of the Kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

For Tillard, the religious state of life is initially a gift of God given to the Church by the Spirit. Born of the Holy Spirit of God, it shares in the mystery of God's communion with all people. Since it stems from divine generosity, the primary concern of this state of life is the commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, 'the one thing necessary', expressed in a relationship built on faith. This faith is not the one conceived in a dogma to be believed, but is an affirmation, a 'yes', embracing one's heart and the whole of one's existence—'Just like the bride's "I do" to her husband'.<sup>45</sup> This relationship is constituted by a charismatic call and a charismatic response of which the Spirit is the source.

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<sup>44</sup> Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, 'The Theological Viewpoint: Religious Life, a Choice Rooted in Faith', in *Faith and Religious Life*, edited by Jean-Marie Roger Tillard and others (Ottawa: Canadian Religious Conference, 1971), 28; see also Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 24–25; Tillard, 'Le Fondement évangélique de la vie religieuse'.

<sup>45</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 20.

*A Charismatic Call*

In Tillard's view, religious life is charismatic from its deepest source, beginning with a 'charismatic call'. It is charismatic in the sense that 'it is the Spirit alone who takes the initiative in the experience that leads a Christian to choose this type of life, and also that such an experience lies beyond the rational'.<sup>46</sup> To clarify the meaning of this charismatic call, Tillard turns to the experience of the Apostles, and links the very beginning of religious life to the first apostolic call.<sup>47</sup> For him, this call was mysterious, elusive and very demanding, as we see in the words of Scripture:

And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people'. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1: 17–18; also Matthew 4: 19–20)

Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (Mark 1: 20; also Matthew 4: 22)

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up, left everything, and followed him. (Luke 5: 27–28)

Another of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father'. But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead'. (Matthew 8: 21–22; also Luke 9: 59–60)

Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me. (Mark 10: 21; also Matthew 19: 21; Luke 18: 22).

For Tillard, this call has 'the extraordinary, abnormal and irrational traits which characterize the irruption of the world of the Spirit'.<sup>48</sup>

It is Jesus who initiates this call. That is, the chosen persons do not ask to be chosen; rather it is Jesus himself who takes the initiative. Moreover, those who receive the call are not necessarily perfect; they are not necessarily better than others and may even be scandalous sinners. It is Jesus who suddenly invades the life of a person. Such an encounter challenges the whole of that person's being, leading him or her to follow

<sup>46</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 35–36.

<sup>47</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 43–44.

Jesus in the service of the Kingdom. It is only through his Spirit that Jesus intervenes in the form of a charismatic event.<sup>49</sup> As Tillard explains,

If we all agree that the word ‘charism’ signifies an activity of the Spirit and not of man, that it is a humanly perceptible manifestation of God’s grace, a gift presupposing no previous merit on the part of the receiver, the experience of being seized by the Lord’s power, the consciousness of thus entering into the mysterious economy of the eschatological times, then we must admit that the calling of the apostles—including Paul’s vocation—can be understood only in the perspective of God’s charismatic realm.<sup>50</sup>

For Tillard, the apostolic call in which the Lord, through his Spirit, asked the Apostles to live as witnesses to the gospel, was a charismatic call. A vocation to religious life is linked with this apostolic call.<sup>51</sup>

#### *A Charismatic Response*

#### ***An experience arising from a deep encounter with God***

A religious vocation involves a free response to being called. Tillard often describes this response as an act of faith coming from a charismatic encounter with Christ. Through such an experience, God’s call to leave everything and follow Christ awakens an initial reaction that then becomes the soil in which a person’s decisions take root. This reaction is not essentially of a moral and practical order; it is primarily related to enthusiasm—an experience arising from a deep encounter with God within the soul of the person. For Tillard, the underlying ‘enthusiasm is fundamentally doxological, adoring’ and empowers the person to respond in faith.<sup>52</sup>

In order to discover how enthusiasm leads the person to decide to respond to such a call, Tillard examines two New Testament passages: the parables of the treasure and of the fine pearl (Matthew 13:44–46) which ‘shed light on man’s attitude in the encounter with Christ which reorients his life’.<sup>53</sup> Reflecting on the works of some exegetes on these parables, Tillard concludes that, ‘because of the attraction of the Kingdom and the joy it awakens’ everything else is relegated to the background.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 41–43.

<sup>50</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 44–46.

<sup>52</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 46.

<sup>53</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 49.

There is a mysterious enthusiasm created by discovering the inestimable value of the Kingdom that brings joy to the person, and leads him or her to leave everything else behind to follow Christ. To put it quite simply, the radical decision the person makes at such a moment is akin to discovering the Kingdom and to the joy of the discovery.<sup>55</sup> He quoted Joachim Jeremias to support this point,

When that great joy, beyond all measure, seizes a man, it carries him away, penetrates his inmost being, subjugates his mind. All else seems valueless compared with that surpassing worth; no price is too high, and the unreserved surrender of what is most valuable becomes a matter of course. The decisive thing in the double parable is not what the two men give up, but the reason for their doing so: the overwhelming experience of the greatness of their discovery. So it is with the Kingdom of God. The effect of the joyful news is overpowering; it fills the heart with gladness, making life's whole aim the consummation of the divine community, and producing the most whole-hearted self-sacrifice.<sup>56</sup>

For Tillard, the enthusiasm created by the attraction of the Kingdom and the joy that accompanies the call help us to understand Jesus' apparently abnormal and irrational demand: 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26). The mysterious enthusiasm and joy produced by their encounter with Jesus can alone explain the actions of the Apostles when they left everything and followed Jesus. Even when they would rather not follow him, as in the case of Peter on the shore of the lake (John 21:18), or when they rejected and excluded Jesus from their lives, as in the case of Paul, the experience of their encounter with Jesus turned their lives upside down.<sup>57</sup>

Such joy, Tillard emphasizes, is not to be equated with the kind of excitement we associate with pleasure, but it is the 'joy *en kuriô*' (in Christ); it is 'not simply a joy whose object is Christ, but one that finds its whole source and *raison d'être* in the dead and risen Christ'. Moreover, this joy does not come from an experience of piety or inner delight. As 'a manifestation of the Spirit', it is:

<sup>55</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 47–48; see also Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, 61–67.

<sup>56</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (London: SCM, 1963), 158, quoted in Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 48.

<sup>57</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 49–50.

... a realistic enthusiasm, if ever there was one; the enthusiasm associated not with a lighthearted, youthful joy just brushing life with its wings, but with a joy which—despite sufferings, failures and disappointments—springs from communion with the Lord Jesus.

This communion in faith is attained through the experience of a new life that springs from the paschal of Christ, ‘otherwise it would not be the unquestionably *triumphant* joy which resounds here’.<sup>58</sup>

Religious who are seized by Christ in a mysterious moment that determines their life, immediately or gradually, in their ‘following of Christ’ will be embedded in a charismatic experience analogous to that of the Apostles. It is perhaps difficult for religious to say what initially attracted them to choose their state of life. The reasons may be different from person to person, depending on individual backgrounds and cultures.<sup>59</sup> Whatever the reason may be, it is their experience of enthusiasm for Christ which leads religious to put aside other realities and make a decision to follow him.<sup>60</sup> This experience is ‘a moment of wonder before Christ’ which inspires them to discover the key and compelling motivation for making such a choice. This motivation must be,

... not a *for* ... but a *because of* ... and the object of this *because of* is none other than Jesus Christ. One does not become a religious *for* something, *with a view* to something; one enters the religious life *because of* Jesus Christ and his ascendancy. The *for* will come later,

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<sup>58</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 50–51.

<sup>59</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 34.

necessarily, but in the radiance and as the evangelical fruit of the *because of*.<sup>61</sup>

For Tillard, the moment of wonder before Christ also inspires the person's choice of a particular religious institute or a particular form of evangelical service of humanity that furthers a founder's vision.<sup>62</sup> It is through their understanding of the charism of a particular institute that believers usually recognise their personal call and realise that the Spirit is urging them to avail themselves of that grace to the best of their ability.<sup>63</sup> If religious are not aware of this, they will never grasp the *raison d'être* of religious life and, having made a merely external act of profession, they will drag themselves through life in a meaningless way.<sup>64</sup>

The sense of wonder before Christ is unquestionably bound up with a significant aspect of the act of faith—that of contemplation; it is a charismatic experience.<sup>65</sup> For Tillard, this 'contemplative moment in which the "following of Christ" is grounded leans more towards pure faith' and differs totally from 'the tranquil, intellectual contemplation' which 'belongs to man's efforts to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of God'.<sup>66</sup> He sees the former as a charismatic event:

The encounter, possibly initiated in a group experience or in the collective enthusiasm of a 'charismatic' event, will be sealed as a profoundly genuine experience only in the silence, the joyful but secret silence, of the I-Thou relationship. And it is this moment of acknowledgement, of opening to the divine life, which is the contemplative moment .... A moment so essential to faith that, without it, faith becomes meaningless.<sup>67</sup>

For Tillard, the vocation to live the religious life belongs to this level of experience, an experience of faith. The nature of this experience, the quality of the religious life, depends upon the gaze of the heart 'that contemplates God because the person has been "seized by Christ"'.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 56.

<sup>62</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 56–57.

<sup>63</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 162.

<sup>64</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 56–57.

<sup>65</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 57. Contemplation is not 'interpreted as a kind of secret attempt to remonasticize the religious life, ... not the level of rites, of forms of prayer; it is of a wholly different level of existence ... that is, "the gaze of the heart, the mysterious presence of Christ in thick of action"' (65).

<sup>66</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 91–92.

<sup>67</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 58.

This gaze ‘belongs to a depth of the human mind that transcends the habitual level of the reasoning intelligence’.<sup>68</sup> It belongs to the field of intuition and, being bestowed by the Spirit, is entirely charismatic.

Therefore, the life of religious must be centred on faith; that is, faith must underpin their total adherence to God.<sup>69</sup> In Tillard’s judgment, the life of lay Christians, irrespective of any reference to faith, is orientated towards the human adventure of marriage and of a profession or trade through which they can live generous and upright lives.<sup>70</sup> By way of contrast, religious life is centred on the core of faith; that is, faith must come first. Faith must be seen as ‘the warp into which all the other threads are woven .... The threads, which are celibacy, poverty, community, obedience and austere living, presuppose that warp and cannot hold together without it’. If the warp is cut off, the whole meaning of existence for religious is lost.<sup>71</sup> Significantly, ‘faith must entail *praxis* and cannot do otherwise; *praxis* is the sphere in which it unfolds and deepens’.<sup>72</sup>

In short, the charism of religious life in Tillard’s teaching can be interpreted as a charismatic experience in faith. It is God’s special gift given, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to certain members of the faithful. It is a gift of a contemplative moment between a person and the Lord—‘an I-thou relationship’, calling that person to follow Christ absolutely in a special way for the glory of God and the good of others, while at the same time enabling the person to respond to the call throughout his or her entire life.

### **‘Come, Follow Me!’**

Every authentic charism implies a certain combination of genuine originality and special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church. An authentic following of Christ, for religious, must be continuously rooted in the contemplative moment that is grounded in faith, not just in the early days of living the religious life, but when, like Simon Peter, they repeat with tears and in sufferings the initial ‘yes’ that determined the course of their life. This is an experience of the enthusiasm of the mystic, thirsting for the Lord even when frightened by the dark of doubt and

<sup>68</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 71.

<sup>69</sup> Tillard, ‘Theological Viewpoint’, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Tillard, ‘Theological Viewpoint’, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Tillard, ‘Theological Viewpoint’, 22; see Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 71; see Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 49–73.



uncertainty.<sup>73</sup> 'Their enthusiasm has calmed down and become more sober. It has matured. And at the same time it has endured .... There has been a conversion, a deepening of enthusiasm for Jesus.'<sup>74</sup> Religious life 'is not simply a matter of making each of its days harmonize with a model outlined in advance, "once and for all", on the day of profession'. The Christ whom religious desire to follow cannot be immobilised in a prearranged moment of time. Today is not simply an encore of yesterday, although the latter unavoidably leaves its mark upon it. By deciding to follow Christ, religious must continuously recreate themselves in their unconditional attachment to the Lord.<sup>75</sup>

Springing from a contemplative moment, the initial enthusiasm for following Christ must perforce mature over time. Religious, for Tillard, will need to return again and again to that initial 'Come, follow me!' which has determined their life commitment. Like Peter on the shore of the lake, religious will thus rediscover themselves as they learn to discard their illusions. In the end, the one thing that remains and matters is their enthusiasm, which now rises from the deepest recesses of a genuine poverty of heart. From the ground of this radical poverty, their enthusiasm for Christ gradually becomes a mature faith.<sup>76</sup> Irrespective of whether they belong to a contemplative order or to an apostolic congregation, religious continually have 'to honour and to observe that pause for the contemplative moment, the moment when Christ's call found an echo in [them]'.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 60.

<sup>74</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 43.

<sup>75</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 44.

<sup>76</sup> Tillard, *Gospel Path*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Tillard, *There Are Charisms and Charisms*, 65.