

## NEW ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND CHARISMS: CANONICAL DIMENSIONS

LUIS NAVARRO JCD

### 1. Introduction

I have been asked to give a talk on the canonical dimensions of new ecclesial movements and charisms. After accepting this invitation I started to think what to say about this aspect of those movements. While reflecting on the topic, the Pentecost 1998 Meeting of Ecclesial movements and communities in Rome came to mind. One aspect that was evident at that meeting was the great variety of groups present for those days in Rome<sup>1</sup>. The spectrum was large: it ranged from those groups more known internationally, such as *Comunione e Liberazione*, Focolare Movement, Charismatic renewal, Neo-catechumenal Way, S. Egidio Community, to others who are present only in few countries<sup>2</sup>. Some of them have already received approval from the Holy See, while others have not<sup>3</sup>. Most of these groups are associations of the faithful, but some claim that they are not<sup>4</sup>. The variety therefore is already great; however if we examine them from the point of view of their spirituality, apostolic methods, activities, membership, etc., then this variety becomes even greater. This variety is one of the most relevant obstacles to a consistent canonical approach to these realities.

A further obstacle is constituted by the fact that in the legal norms there are no specific references to movements. All of this certainly makes it difficult to speak about the canonical dimensions of ecclesial movements. However even if it is difficult, it is not impossible. A way to reach this aim is to look at the reality of these movements and communities and detect what juridical elements are consistently present. For this task, a good help is provided by the Magisterium of the Roman Pontiff. This is not because the Magisterium contains a juridical treatment of these realities, but rather because the Magisterium is where we find answers of the Church to the challenges placed by something new. Canon Law relies upon these answers.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the list and a brief description of the ecclesial movements and communities participating in the meeting, cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, special issue 29 May 1998, p. 9-15.

<sup>2</sup> That was the case of the Nazaret Movement (present in 5 countries), the Light-Life movement (5 countries), and the Seguimi-Gruppo Laico (6 countries).

<sup>3</sup> When that Meeting took place some movements like Couples for Christ, the Community of the Beatitudes, and the Community Pope John XXIII were not recognized by the Holy See, but have received the recognition later. Other groups, also present in that Meeting, still do not have that recognition from the Holy See (like the Neo-catechumenal Way or El-Shaddai).

<sup>4</sup> Although in this paper I will deal with aspects related to all these realities, this does not mean that all have the same juridical configuration: most of them are associations of the faithful in the technical sense (see can. 298-329), but others can be of different juridical configurations.

This study follows the following structures: first, it will present some highlights of the *Magisterium* of John Paul II on ecclesial movements. From these teachings it will underline only those aspects that contribute to a canonical reflection on the ecclesial movements. Because of the importance given to them by the Pope, these should be considered as the foundation on which the building has to lay.

Second, it will describe what is *the mission of Canon Law* in dealing with these realities. This will lead to a presentation as to what an ecclesial movement can expect from the Law of the Church. Connected to that is the task of the canon lawyer with regards to these movements.

Finally, third, it will point out some *open issues and new challenges*. In some cases it will suggest solutions to some real problems that the movements and the hierarchy are facing.

As I write this I am aware that my reflections will have a temporary value, because ecclesial movements are a fluid reality and in almost constant evolution. Therefore, after some years some problems will disappear or present other signs, and other new ones will inevitably follow.

## **2. The Holy Father and the new ecclesial movements**

This section will analyze two aspects. First it will concentrate on the different *published* addresses, messages or homilies of John Paul II to international gatherings of ecclesial movements, organized, directly or indirectly by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. And second, it will recall some important teachings found in the 1988 apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*.

### **a) Papal addresses to the ecclesial movements**

The first international meeting was held in Rome in September of 1981. The second took place also in Rome in March of 1987. The third was more recent and more well known to everybody. This was the meeting and congress on ecclesial movements held in Rome in 1998<sup>5</sup>. And the fourth and last, was held in Speyer (Germany) in June of 1999<sup>6</sup>,

---

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily*, 27 September 1981, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English edition, n. 40, 5 October 1981, p. 1; IDEM, *Address*, 2 March 1987, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English edition, n. 11, 16 March 1987, p. 12; IDEM, *Message*, 27 May 1998, in PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, *Movements in the Church. Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements*, Vatican City 1999, p. 15-19; IDEM, *Address*, 30 May 1998, in PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, *Movements in the Church*, cit., p. 219-224.

In 1991 April 1-4, another meeting was held, in this case in Bratislava. The aim of the meeting was to make some suggestions to the Synod of Europe. The Pope sent a written message, read by Bishop Cordes (Vice President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity) dated in the Vatican, 24 March 1991, but it was not published. There is short literal quotation of it in *Il Regno-attualità*, 1991-10, p. 278. On the eve of this

This study will also take into account the Pope's address to another meeting dealing with movements, held in 1999<sup>7</sup>. This meeting was different because it was not held with representatives of movements but rather it was a meeting of bishops. The aim of the organizers of this meeting is evident in its title: "The ecclesial movements in the pastoral solicitude of the Bishops".

**Even though the Pope has spoken many times to the different ecclesial movements in special audiences, or in others events, I have chosen to concentrate in those I have mentioned, because they reflect the approach of the Pope to these realities in a general way (he is not speaking to a specific ecclesial movement), and because through these teachings we can observe John Paul II's thought on this topic over a long period of time (more that 18 years).**

From the study on the Pope's teaching the following conclusions can be drawn:

First conclusion. *The importance of the ecclesial movements for the Church*

It is obvious that John Paul II truly appreciates the new ecclesial movements. The fact is already apparent in that he has received them in several occasions, but more obvious is his understanding of the *importance* of these movements for the Church. This awareness of their importance seems to have grown over the years. In 1981, the first time he encountered these movements, his words could be considered as a generic encouragement. Later on in 1987 he spoke of the great apostolic dynamism that is present in the ecclesial movements<sup>8</sup>. Eleven years later, in 1998, he goes further and affirms that the movements «represent one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council»<sup>9</sup>. These movements, he said, «have a *very precise* — we can even say irreplaceable — function in the Church»<sup>10</sup>. More

---

meeting an article was published by J. CORDES, *Stagione aggregativa dei laici per una nuova evangelizzazione*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 March 1991, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> This meeting, just a year after the one held in Rome in the Pentecost Vigil, was a manifestation of communion between the movements in order to share the gifts received by each one, helping each other and cooperating in the evangelization. The Pope has sent a message, 3 June 1999, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 June 1999, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 18 June 1999, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English edition, n. 28, 14 July 1999, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> «The great blossoming of these movements and the manifestations of energy and ecclesial vitality which characterize them are certainly to be considered one of the most precious fruits of the vast and profound spiritual renewal promoted by the last Council». JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 2 March 1987, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 27 May 1998, n. 2, cit., p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 2 March 1987, n. 3

recently he has presented these movements as a «new Pentecost in the Church», and that they are a cause of hope for the missionary action of the Church<sup>11</sup>.

It is clear that the Pope has very attentively followed the evolution of the movements and also the fruits of renewal that through them the Holy Spirit is granting to the Church.

However, his understanding of their importance is based not only on the recent history of the Church. He has tried always to present these realities as something deeply rooted in the Church. Even as early as 1981 he applied the term “movement” to the Church: «as you know the Church herself is “a movement”»<sup>12</sup>. With this image he wanted to indicate the intimate dynamism of the Holy Trinity and of God’s redemptive and creative action: «The Church herself is “a movement”. And above all she is a mystery: the mystery of the eternal Love of the Father, of his fatherly heart, from which the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit begin»<sup>13</sup>. The Church is «a “movement” which penetrates into hearts and consciences. She is a “movement” which takes its place in the history of man-person and of human communities»<sup>14</sup>. Later he explained the relationship between this doctrine and the movements: «“Movements” in the Church must reflect the mystery of that love from which she was born and is continually being born<sup>15</sup>». In 1998, he came back to the same idea: the Church, «in a certain sense may be called a “movement” herself, since she is the realization in time and space of the Father’s sending of his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit»<sup>16</sup>.

#### Second conclusion. *The fundamental role of the charism in the movements*

At the origin of the ecclesial movements there has always been a *charism* given to a founder. This charism, if it is shown true, contributes to the richness of the Church. Every charism is a gift freely granted by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church.

This is why the Roman Pontiff insists on the fact that there can be no opposition between *charism and institution*. Rather, there is a complementarity between them: «[movements] are founded on those “charismatic gifts” which together with the “hierarchical gifts” — that is the ordained ministries — belong to those gifts of the Holy

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 18 June 1999, n. 3. In his encyclical letter about the missionary activity of the Church, John Paul II manifests a deep appreciation of the movements, because they are «a true gift of God both for the new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so-called». JOHN PAUL II, encyclical letter *Redemptoris missio*, December 12, 1990, n. 72. This dimension of the ecclesial movements is stressed by J. GONZÁLEZ, *Movements of Hope — Signs of Hope in our Contemporary Church*, in *Boletín eclesialístico de Filipinas*, 74 (1998), p. 34-41.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily*, 27 September 1981, n. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 27 May 1998, n. 5, cit., p. 19.

Spirit which adorn the Church, the Bride and Christ. Charismatic gifts and hierarchical gifts are distinct but also *mutually complementary*». He concludes: «In the Church, both the institutional and the charismatic aspects, both the hierarchy and associations and movements of the faithful, are co-essential and share in fostering life, renewal and sanctification, though in different ways<sup>17</sup>». In 1998 he recalled the same idea, saying, «both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus, because they both help to make the mystery of Christ and his saving grace present in the world»<sup>18</sup>.

Third conclusion. *The charism lead to form groups of faithful*

Charisms takes root in groups of faithful who later on usually become an association.

Charisms would not be operative if there were not external manifestations of each movement. The power of the charism tends to reach out to other people, and lead them to unite themselves forming groups. The Pope describes this reality saying, «in the Church's history we have continually witnessed the phenomenon of more or less vast groups of the faithful, which, under a mysterious impulse of the Spirit, have been spontaneously moved to join together in pursuit of certain charitable or sanctifying ends. This has come about in relation to the particular needs of the Church in their day, or even involved collaboration in the Church's essential and permanent mission. This right to gather in groups is openly recognized in the new Code of Canon Law, which speaks of "associations which serve charitable or pious purposes or which foster the Christian vocation in the world" (can. 215): words which we can certainly apply to ecclesial movements as well»<sup>19</sup>.

In these new ecclesial entities it is not the will of each faithful which constitutes the movement (as happens in many associations of the faithful), but it is the impulse of the Spirit plus the agreement of the will of the faithful which creates the movement. Also in the establishment of the movement, the founder and his or her spiritual life take on a special role, inspired by God: «the passage from the original charism to the movement happens through the mysterious attraction that the founder holds for all those who become involved in his spiritual experience»<sup>20</sup>.

Fourth conclusion. *The importance given to the ontological condition of the baptized.*

A common aspect that can be found in the new movements is that all of them give a special relevance to what it means to be a *baptized person*: «Even in the diversity of their forms, these movements are marked by a common awareness of the 'newness' which

---

<sup>17</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 2 March 1987, n. 3.

<sup>18</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 27 May 1998, n. 5, cit., p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 2 March 1987, n. 2.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 30 May 1998, n. 6, p. 222.

baptismal grace brings to life, through a remarkable longing to reflect on the mystery of communion with Christ and with their brethren»<sup>21</sup>. This characteristic is due to the fact that the spirit of these movements gives sense to the *whole Christian life of the faithful*. This can also be traced to the words of the Pope: the «members of the Church who find themselves in associations and movements seek to live, under the impulse of the Spirit, the Word of God in their concrete historical circumstances. They do so by stimulating, with their witness, constantly renewed spiritual progress, by evangelically vivifying temporal realities and human values, and enriching the Church through an infinite and inexhaustible variety of initiatives in the realm of charity and holiness»<sup>22</sup>. These movements therefore do not affect only partial aspects of Christian life, but are new ways of living the Christian message.

#### Fifth conclusion. *The need to be in the communion of the Church*

Because the Pope has been aware that in the last decades not all in the movements has been good, he has often stressed the need for communion. To emphasize this need, in the largest of the gatherings of ecclesial movements, which was held in St. Peter's Square, he proclaimed the identification between maturity in the Church and communion: «Today a new stage is unfolding before you: that of ecclesial maturity. This does not mean that all problems have been solved. Rather is a challenge. A road to take. The Church expects from you the “mature” fruits of communion and commitment»<sup>23</sup>.

One year later, in a written message to the bishops, the Pope explained this critical path: «This journey requires of movements an ever stronger communion with the Pastors God has chosen and consecrated to gather and sanctify his people in the light of faith, hope and charity, because “no charism dispenses a person from reference and submission to the Pastor of the Church” (*Christifideles laici*, n. 24)»<sup>24</sup>.

It is a communion to be lived not only in relation to the Roman Pontiff, but also and chronologically first in the particular Church, because it is here where the initial discernment of the charism is done. And this discernment is essential. In fulfilling that task the Bishops are called «to show fatherly magnanimity and far-sighted charity»<sup>25</sup>. This

---

<sup>21</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 27 May 1998, n. 2, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 2 March 1987, n. 3. In his 1998 address the Pope indicates: «True charisms cannot but aim at the encounter with Christ in the sacraments. The ecclesial realities to which you belong have helped you to rediscover your baptismal vocation, to appreciate the gifts of the Spirit received at Confirmation, to entrust yourselves to God's forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation and to recognize the Eucharist as the source and summit of all Christian life». JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 30 May 1998, n. 7, p. 223.

<sup>23</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address*, 30 May 1998, n. 6, p. 222.

<sup>24</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 18 June 1999, n. 3.

<sup>25</sup> «Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I ask you, whose task is to discern the authenticity of charisms in order to make the best use of them within the Church, to show fatherly magnanimity and far-sighted charity (cf. 1 Cor 13:4) towards these realities, because every human achievement requires time and patience for its proper and indispensable purification». JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 18 June 1999, n. 3.

means that not everything is achieved immediately in the movements. Therefore the hierarchy has to be patient: every growth needs time.

The concern of the Pope is that the local Churches should receive these gifts of the Holy Spirit, in their fullness, with all the power which is proper to them.

After presenting these characteristics, examining the *description of ecclesial movements* as presented by the Pope in 1998 can help to understand better what are these movements in the Church. This is a key point in the Pope's teaching, because it constitutes the summary of his understanding of these realities:

«The term [movement] is often used to refer to realities that differ among themselves, sometimes even by reason of their canonical structure. Though the term certainly cannot exhaust or capture the wealth of forms aroused by the life-giving creativity of the Spirit of Christ, it does indicate a concrete ecclesial reality with predominantly lay membership, a journey of faith and a Christian witness which bases its own pedagogical method on a precise charism given to the person of the founder in specific circumstances and ways»<sup>26</sup>.

In this description therefore, we find these elements:

1. A movement is a concrete *ecclesial* reality. Therefore its reason for existing is in the communion of the Church. If it loses this ecclesiality, it will die.

2. The ecclesial movements are composed mainly by *lay people*, even though other faithful can also be members. This aspect will be reflected in the spirituality: it will be usually a secular one.

3. Every movement constitutes *a way* of faith as well as a Christian witness in the Church and in society.

4. In every movement we can find a *charism* given to the founder at its base.

#### **b) The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*.**

In the apostolic exhortation written by John Paul II after the 1987 Synod of Bishops (dedicated to the lay people in the Church and in the world), we find relevant interventions of the Pope with regard to ecclesial movements. These interventions deal with their institutionalization, the criteria for discerning their ecclesiality, and with their fruits.

---

<sup>26</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message*, 27 May 1998, n. 4, p. 18.

Because these movements and realities are something new in the Church, and therefore do not follow traditional models, the Pope has asked these ecclesial realities (especially those whose activity goes beyond the diocesan level) to seek institutionalization: «It is exceedingly opportune that some new associations and movements receive official recognition and explicit approval from competent Church authority to facilitate their growth on both the national and international level»<sup>27</sup>.

His most significant contribution is found in his listing of the criteria of ecclesiality which each movement should have in the Church.

In a brief summary these criteria are:

- The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness.
- The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith.
- The witness to a strong and authentic communion.
- Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals.
- A commitment to a presence in human society<sup>28</sup>.

---

<sup>27</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Ap. ex. *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988, n. 31. The need to find a juridical configuration has been stressed by the Pope also in relation to concrete ecclesial realities. See his call to the Neo-catechumenal Way to elaborate their own Statutes and to present them for approval, in *Address to the Neo-catechumenal Way*, January 24, 1997, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 January 1997, p. 4 and his *Letter to Cardinal Stafford on the Neo-catechumenal Way*, 5 April 2001, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17-18 April 2001, p. 4. (English version in [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_20010417\\_pc-laici\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20010417_pc-laici_en.html))

<sup>28</sup> «The following basic criteria might be helpful in evaluating an association of the lay faithful in the Church:

- *The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness*, as it is manifested "in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful" and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity.

In this sense whatever association of the lay faithful there might be, it is always called to be more of an instrument leading to holiness in the Church, through fostering and promoting "a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith".

- *The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith*, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content.

- *The witness to a strong and authentic communion* in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church, and with the local Bishop, "the visible principle and foundation of unity" in the particular Church, and in "mutual esteem for all forms of the Church's apostolate".

The communion with Pope and Bishop must be expressed in loyal readiness to embrace the doctrinal teachings and pastoral initiatives of both Pope and Bishop. Moreover, Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together.

- *Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals*, that is, "the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life".

A study of these criteria makes easily imaginable that when John Paul II established them, he had these new ecclesial movements mainly in mind. In fact, there is no doubt that all these criteria will be found in any movement having the characteristics we have deduced from the Pope's teaching (his addresses, messages and homilies to the movements).

The same can be said with regard to the fruit that, according to the Pope, should be present in each association. These fruits are signs that the movement is truly in the Church. All of them belong to the experience of the movements. The Pope says:

«The fundamental criteria mentioned at this time find their verification in the actual fruits that various group forms show in their organizational life and the works they perform».

Among these fruits he speaks of: «the renewed appreciation for prayer, contemplation, liturgical and sacramental life, the reawakening of vocations to Christian marriage, the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life; a readiness to participate in programs and Church activities at the local, national and international levels; a commitment to catechesis and a capacity for teaching and forming Christians; a desire to be present as Christians in various settings of social life and the creation and awakening of charitable, cultural and spiritual works; the spirit of detachment and evangelical poverty leading to a greater generosity in charity towards all; conversion to the Christian life or the return to Church communion of those baptized members who have fallen away from the faith».

From all this, we can conclude that the ecclesial movements constitute a new phenomenon that is *still in evolution*. In the last decades there has been a clear progress in their theological understanding, and in their acceptance by the People of God<sup>29</sup>. However, almost assuredly, more progress has to come. Therefore, considering the great variety of movements and communities, it is difficult to place them inside rigid borders. Their constant evolution and their variety are the reasons why there is not a definitive definition (those that have been proposed necessarily have the risk of not being adequate after some

---

From this perspective, every one of the group forms of the lay faithful is asked to have a missionary zeal which will increase their effectiveness as participants in a re-evangelization.

- *A commitment to a presence in human society*, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person.

Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society». JOHN PAUL II, Ap. ex. *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988, n. 30. For a commentary on these criteria, see R. PAGÉ, *Note sur les "critères d'ecclésiabilité pour les associations de laïcs"*, in *Studia Canonica*, 24 (1990), pp. 455-463.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. among the most relevant articles on the theological understanding of the ecclesial movements, see J. RATZINGER, *The Ecclesial Movements: A Theological Reflection on Their Place in the Church*, in *Movements in the Church*, cit., p. 23-51 (also published as *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, in *Communio* 25 [Fall 1998], p. 480-504), and A. CATTANEO, *I movimenti ecclesiali: aspetti ecclesiologici*, in *Annales Theologici*, 11 (1997), p. 407-427.

years<sup>30</sup>). The definitions that have been used until now have the tendency of describing the phenomena. As a clear sign of the provisional character of the definition these descriptions have to speak of movements both in a strict sense and in a wide sense<sup>31</sup>.

---

<sup>30</sup> The definition proposed by Feliciani is in a sense outdated, because nowadays the movements are not so reluctant to have statutes or internal norms: «la caratteristica specifica ed esclusiva dei movimenti propriamente detti sembra (...) da identificarsi in quella natura eminentemente carismatica e spirituale che li porta talvolta a evitare la compilazione di statuti scritti e ne impedisce, comunque, un inquadramento adeguato ed esauriente in strutture giuridico-formali come quelle previste dalla normativa del Codice». G. FELICIANI, *I movimenti ecclesiali*, in *L'année canonique*, 36 (1993), p. 81. For Beyer, the ecclesial movements are “quelli che annoverano e radunano ogni genere di fedeli, per vivere pienamente la vita della Chiesa nel suo mistero, alla luce di vari elementi scelti fra i più importanti, come la Parola di Dio, la comunione ecclesiale, l'azione comune anche specifica, il dono e la testimonianza dell'amore divino”. J. BEYER, *Il movimento ecclesiale: questioni attuali*, in *Vita consacrata*, 26 (1990), p. 484. This description is proposed just after explaining that there are other associative realities that *are not* ecclesial movements. He calls them *lay movements* and *spiritual movements*: “*Laicali* sono i movimenti che raggruppano laici perché nel laicato agiscano in veste di laici, e promuovano i laici una vita cristiana più piena, nella Chiesa e nel mondo. *Spirituali* sono i movimenti non solo di laici, ma anche di altri fedeli cristiani che intendono condurre una vita spirituale più profonda; tra i loro aderenti contano laici, religiosi e sacerdoti, anche diocesani”. *Ibid.* p. 483-484. The proposed definition nevertheless is not good enough because it is too large (it does not indicate what is specific in goals, and action of the ecclesial movement) and, as the other elements can be common to other ecclesial realities, what becomes characteristic is that all kind of faithful belong to the movement. Following Beyer, Zadra considers that in the “ecclesial movements” «il carisma comunione di tali movimenti è espresso dal fatto che vi fa parte una rappresentanza di tutto il popolo di Dio: sacerdoti, religiosi, laici, famiglie, bambini, ecc. che vivono ogni momento della loro vita illuminati da tale carisma, non da soli, ma uniti spiritualmente a tutti i membri del movimento». B. ZADRA, *Tipologie ed esemplificazioni dei diversi movimenti*, in *Quaderni di diritto ecclesiale*, 11 (1998), p. 16. It could be objected that *not all* ecclesial movements *must* have as members all kind of faithful, especially because in the Pope's description and also in reality, the movements are mainly lay groups.

<sup>31</sup> Some authors follow the classification suggested by Beyer and develop some of its elements. They distinguish also lay movements, spiritual movements and ecclesial movements. «I primi — laicali — raggruppano per lo più laici che desiderano vivere pienamente la loro vocazione e missione nella Chiesa (è il caso, ad esempio, dell'Azione Cattolica). I secondi — spirituali — tendono piuttosto a promuovere una più profonda vita spirituale nei confronti dei fedeli che ne fanno parte (molti dei terzi ordini appartengono a questa categoria). Infine ci sono i movimenti propriamente “ecclesiali”, i quali si caratterizzano per il fatto che a essi partecipano le varie categorie di fedeli e i vari ordini di persone. Questi ultimi si distinguono inoltre per un'azione e una testimonianza pubblica, coinvolgendo la vita dei propri membri in una dimensione che non è solo spirituale, ma ingloba precise strutture di vita. Il movimento ecclesiale nasce attorno a un carisma specifico che ne rappresenta l'idea-forza attorno a cui si strutturano vari stati di vita. C'è una dimensione unificante che determina, pur se a vari livelli di appartenenza secondo le differenti vocazioni, una certa comunione di beni, una certa sottomissione a una autorità, una partecipazione alla missione della Chiesa secondo il carisma del movimento. Questa dimensione unitaria-comunione vede riuniti nel movimento membri di tutto il popolo di Dio, che partecipano alle varie vocazioni e ai vari ministeri. Si può per analogia parlare di una “micro-ecclesia” riunita attorno a un carisma fondazionale che ha una sua fisionomia, una particolare spiritualità, fini propri perseguiti sia congiuntamente che separatamente secondo i vari *status* delle persone». S. RECCHI, *Per una configurazione canonica dei movimenti ecclesiali*, in *Quaderni di diritto ecclesiale*, 11 (1998), p. 58-59. A different description of the essential elements of a movement can be founded in C. HEGGE, *Il Vaticano II e i movimenti ecclesiali. Una recezione carismatica*, Roma 2001, p. 88-94.

What can be said is that the new ecclesial movements do not follow traditional forms that were present in the Church. That is why the Pope distinguishes between the movements, new communities, and the normal associations of the faithful.

### 3. The function of Canon Law in relationship to ecclesial movements

In the People of God some faithful, not excluding some founders of ecclesial movements, have a negative understanding of Canon Law. It seems that, for them, norms are something that cannot be avoided. They seem a burden imposed on them by the Church, and an element that will reduce their freedom, and hinder their charism. In other cases, some do not even understand why there is need of Law in the Church. They ask, is it not the Spirit the one who governs the Church?

Even if some founders would prefer not to have anything to do with the law, inevitably they decide to consult a canon lawyer because they discover that some advantages for the movement can be found making use of the Law of the Church. In fact, as they become aware that one day they will die and that others will need to take their place, they tend to find it convenient that Canon Law provides basic and solid points which will grant the continuity of the movement. Without it, there is a clear risk that everything could get lost. Realizing the bigger picture they determine that Canon Law would be only a minor evil.

This is a negative understanding of Canon Law and unfortunately this mentality is quite far spread in the Church. It reflects an *utilitarian mentality* of the Law: the Law exists to obtain aims, and principally to have a just social order. Respecting the norms will help the faithful to live better in the Church. In this perspective Law would be an instrument completely external to the social relationships in the Church. It would be like an umbrella which covers a person. It gives shadow, and protects from the rain, but remains external to the person who is holding it. Law would be something that you need sometimes, but not always. If I can get something positive from the Law, I'll accept it, but if I cannot get any advantage, I'll refuse it.

Instead, if we have a more realistic outlook, Law is different. The reality of ecclesial life points out that Canon Law responds to the inner demands of justice present in interpersonal relationships. The law determines to whom things belong (*ius suum cuique tribuendo*). However these are not external rules, given by an external will or agent. Law flows from the same relationships, from their demands of justice. The law is based on reality, and the more it is attached to reality, the more rational it will be<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> For the realistic outlook of the Law see J. HERVADA, *Natural right and natural law: a critical introduction*, Pamplona, 1987 (Spanish edition: *Introducción crítica al Derecho Natural*, 5.ed. corregida, Pamplona 1988). He has applied this approach to Canon Law: see *Pensamientos de un canonista en la hora presente*, Pamplona 1989, p. 11-79 and *Coloquios propedéuticos sobre el Derecho Canónico*, Pamplona 1990. For the different ways of understanding Canon Law and its relation to the Church, and for a

With this perspective the role of Canon Law with regard to movements and charisms is to grant the juridical configuration which is better adapted to the *real substance of each movement* and therefore to the inner demands of justice. The rights and duties flow from the charisms, not from an external agent. This means that Canon Law is an instrument at the service of charisms, because it will allow every movement to preserve their charism, respecting their original demands. It will help the movement to keep its identity independently of the time elapsed since the movement started to exist in the Church. The normal renewal of members (some will die, others will abandon the movement, etc.) will not affect the charism or the spirit of the movement. In this way, Canon Law will help to keep the ends and aims of the movement consistent.

In this realistic prospective of Canon Law it can be easily understood that the existence of a concrete charism in the Church, demands that the charism's bearer be not impeded in sharing it with other faithful in the Church, and that the ecclesiastical authority examine it attentively, with respect and with due attention the new charism, and in the end declare its conformity with the teaching of the Church. There is no canon in the Code which establishes this explicitly, however, this does not prevent recognizing the existence of juridical obligations and rights deriving from juridical relations born around a charism<sup>33</sup>.

This realistic outlook will also help to place the movement in the communion of the Church. Therefore the movement will be able to contribute in a better way to the good of the whole Church.

#### **4. The canon lawyer and the movements**

What is the task of canon lawyers? Their main duty is to help these movements to achieve the juridical configuration that better reflects their substantial reality. This means that their task will be to help to prepare the Statutes and By-laws of these movements well.

In doing this, canon lawyers should avoid certain dangers that can be easily present: the first is to have a set model of statutes and then to attempt to apply them to all these realities. But this would be unjust because the statutes will not fit to what the movement is.

The second one is to reduce their task to obtaining what the founder desires from the ecclesiastical authority for the movement. The process would be the following: after listening to the founder or moderators, the canon lawyer presents things in such a way,

---

development of the realistic perspective see C.J. ERRÁZURIZ, *Il diritto e la giustizia nella Chiesa. Per una teoria fondamentale del diritto canonico*, Milano 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. P. LOMBARDÍA, *Relevancia de los carismas personales en el ordenamiento canónico*, in *Ius Canonicum*, 9 (1969), p. 101-119.

using the canons with such ability, that the competent ecclesiastical authority will satisfy the moderator's desire. The role of canon lawyers would be to process the request of the movement. The canon lawyer would be a technician who knows how the machine works and how to fix it, but does not ask himself what is the use of the machine.

To do the job properly canon lawyers are called to truly know what the movement really is. For that we need to know their history, their development, their spirituality, and the elements that configure the charism. This implies reading the writings that have inspired the movement, and also knowing the life of the movement. The canon lawyer needs to listen to the founders, moderators, and attempt to understand what they want, and perhaps more important why they want it.

Only after having a clear picture, can the canon lawyer suggest and explain the different technical options that can be applied to the movement, helping the founder to make good choices. After that, his task will be to translate into juridical norms what is already juridical in the movement.

It is at this stage that the canon lawyer adopts a more active role: his mission will lead him or her to guide the moderator or founders. In many instances he is called to help the movement to improve: once he has really understood what the charism is, the aims, and the spirit of the movement he can help to improve it in order to implement the criteria of ecclesiality. The drafting of the Statutes and By Laws, or their renewal is a unique moment in which canon lawyers exercise a real ministry of service. By doing this well, they can help the movement to be more ecclesial and therefore to serve the whole Church better.

## **5. Main canonical questions dealing with movements**

### **a) The configuration of movements as private associations of the faithful**

Most of the movements present in Rome during the 1998 meeting are actually international private associations of faithful. In canonical doctrine some hold the opinion that this configuration is not good enough, especially because, they say, it cannot guarantee the unity of the movement (some parts will have another canonical configuration, like a Society of Apostolic Life for the priests members of the movement, or a religious institute for those who follow consecrated life, etc.).

To resolve this concrete problem some have suggested the creation of a new legal frame for the ecclesial movements. It would be a special law for all these realities<sup>34</sup>. Jean

---

<sup>34</sup> For Beyer and Ghirlanda there is a need of a special law for the movements. Cf. J. BEYER, *Il rinnovamento del diritto e del laicato nella Chiesa*, Milano 1994, p. 167, IDEM, *I movimenti nuovi nella Chiesa*, in *Vita Consacrata*, 27 (1991), p. 63; and G. GHIRLANDA, *I movimenti nella comunione ecclesiale e loro giusta autonomia*, in *Christifideles laici: spunti per uno studio*, I laici oggi (P. Consiglio per i laici), 32-33 (1989-90), Città del Vaticano, p. 57 and IDEM, *Charism and Juridical Status of the Ecclesial Movements*, in *Movements in the Church*, cit., p. 135. See also C. HEGGE, *Il Vaticano II e i movimenti*

Beyer goes further, suggesting the creation of a new dicastery for movements and ecclesial communities<sup>35</sup>.

Nevertheless, the actual solution (to recognize them as private associations) the can be considered a wise one and most probably the one that at the present time can be granted. In fact, the majority of these ecclesial movements are essentially associations of the faithful. Therefore the solution is fitting to their nature<sup>36</sup>. Even though it is true that in some cases different canonical configurations have been given to different parts of a single movement, this does not mean that the unity of the movement cannot be guaranteed. For example, in the case of a movement organized as a confederation of juridical persons, if it established that the general Statutes in which the charism is described and protected, are applied to all the entities that form the confederation, then the unity of the movement can be preserved<sup>37</sup>. In the case of an international movement adopting this system, the unity will not be affected by the fact that different dicasteries of the Roman Curia will be competent to deal with the different branches of the movement, because some interdicasterial commissions can be established.

Taking into account the great diversity of movements in the Church and that most of them are still in a stage of development of their charism, it seems difficult to give them a common legal status, which perhaps will appear inadequate in a few years. However to create a new legislation for the movements is also premature because movements are among themselves very different. Most of them are still defining their charisms, and have not yet reached the stability typical of maturity. If they were placed now in a legal framework it may become an obstacle to their development and their freedom. This new legal framework could place some movements into a too strict and narrow model that is

---

*ecclesiali. Una recezione carismatica*, cit., p. 116. In his book this author suggests two possible juridical configurations for the movements: as public associations of the faithful or a new solution inspired on can. 605. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 97-120.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J. BEYER, *Il movimento ecclesiale: questioni attuali*, cit., p. 485, IDEM, *I movimenti nuovi nella Chiesa*, cit., p. 75 and C. HEGGE, *Il Vaticano II e i movimenti ecclesiali. Una recezione carismatica*, cit., p. 114. Ghirlanda suggest the creation of a permanent interdicasterial commission for movements. Cf. G. GHIRLANDA, *I movimenti nella comunione ecclesiale e loro giusta autonomia*, in *Christifideles laici: spunti per uno studio*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Examining the praxis of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Feliciani explains: «Alla luce di tale normativa, che non appare destinata a subire nel prossimo futuro significative evoluzioni, e considerata la effettiva realtà dei movimenti ecclesiali quale si presenta *hic et nunc*, si può ritenere che per queste aggregazioni è di norma preferibile un riconoscimento come associazioni private, conformemente alla prassi adottata dal Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici». G. FELICIANI, *I movimenti ecclesiali e i compiti del vescovo diocesano*, in *I movimenti ecclesiali nella sollecitudine pastorale dei vescovi*, Città del Vaticano 2000, p. 213. Martínez Sistach is also of the opinion that actually it is not convenient to give a new legislation for the movements. Cf. LI. MARTÍNEZ SISTACH, *Las asociaciones de fieles*, Barcelona 2000, 4 ed., p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> In some movements there are general Statutes for the whole movement and particular Statutes for each section. The general Statutes logically are applied to each section. On this topic, see S. RECCHI, *Per una configurazione canonica dei movimenti ecclesiali*, cit., p. 61.

not fitting to them<sup>38</sup>. The alternative is the associative frame which seems to be a good step, because it is very wide and flexible and it allows the possibility of creating statutes fitting to each movement.

### b) The movements and the particular Churches

As has been mentioned previously, the Pope has indicated that the time has come in which the movements will also need to become mature in their communion with the local Churches<sup>39</sup>. This means not only a growth of the movement, but also of the local Church. As the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines rightly states, «members of such renewal groups should realize that the Spirit has raised them up to renew the local Church. Movements of renewal are not only for their members but for the whole Church»<sup>40</sup>.

It is true that in some cases there have been some misunderstandings between movements and the Hierarchy, leading them not to respect each other's functions. A juridical examination of these facts, will conclude that the misunderstandings often lead to injustice, in the sense that the local Church will be deprived from a charism that can contribute to its richness<sup>41</sup>. Problems could easily arise if the members of the movement see their right to spread the charism limited or if they pretend to act out of the communion of the Church, abusing of their rights in the Church.

In order to clarify the presence and activities of the ecclesial movements in the particular Church and the relationship with the ecclesiastical authority different situations need to be distinguished.

---

<sup>38</sup> As Ratzinger has pointed out, a certain level of institutionalization is necessary, but there is also a danger of an excess of institutionalization, and to create that proposed new legislation could be one. These are the words of Ratzinger: «una certa istituzionalizzazione è inevitabile. Dobbiamo però essere molto attenti per evitare che l'istituzione diventi un'armatura che alla fine schiaccia la vita e fare il possibile perché l'elemento istituzionale resti per così dire semplice, in modo che non spenga lo Spirito». J. RATZINGER, *Dialogo*, in *I movimenti ecclesiali nella sollecitudine pastorale dei vescovi*, Città del Vaticano 2000, p. 229.

<sup>39</sup> For the relation between the ecclesial movements and particular Churches see the excellent article of A. CATTANEO, *Los movimientos eclesiales. Cuestiones eclesiológicas y canónicas*, in *Ius Canonicum*, 38 (1998), 579-594.

<sup>40</sup> SECOND PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES, *The Conciliar Document*, Part. IV, The Community of Disciples: workers of Renewal, n. 611, in *Acts and decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, 20 January-17 February 1991, Manila 1992, p. 206. For a short commentary on this Council, see A. T. OPALALIC, *The second plenary council of the Philippines*, in *Ius Ecclesiae*, 6 (1994), p. 825-832.

<sup>41</sup> When the ecclesial movements are well understood by the hierarchy, then «properly guided they draw attention to the continuing presence, power, and activity of the Spirit in the Church and in the world. They foster an intense Christian and apostolic life, move passive Catholics by their witnessing, and prevent the lapse of many Catholics into other Christian groups». SECOND PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES, *The Conciliar Document*, Part. IV, The Community of Disciples: workers of Renewal, n. 612, cit., p. 206.

As not all the situations are the same, at least two different ways of presence of a movement in the particular Church need to be distinguished.

1. Some movements for the implementation of their charism, for the achievement of their finalities have their own activities, houses and facilities. In these the members receive the specific formation granted by the movement, or other faithful receive the Christian message. These movements contribute to the renewal of the diocese and of the faithful, but do not need to become an element of renewal of the external ecclesiastical structure of the diocese: they are not officially represented in the parish structure or in the diocesan organizations. In other words, there are movements that are not active as a group in the parish organization, because they are not called to do it; neither do they need it, because their charism does not demand it.

Once the ecclesiastical authority has accepted these movements in the diocese, his function is to respect, appreciate and foster their work<sup>42</sup>, being aware that if the movements are really ecclesial, their presence in the diocese will be for the good of the Church. To allow the movement to be faithful to their charism is the greatest service that the bishop can give to the movement and to the same diocese. At the same time, the ecclesiastical authority should exercise his duty of vigilance and control of the movements, because he is called to remove any danger to the faith and morals of his flock. If a movement strays from the communion of the Church, the Pastor has the duty to bring it back to the ecclesiastical communion. If he does not succeed, then he will have to declare that the movement must cease from being active in the diocese and, if he has the competence, then has to declare the movement out of the Church, and therefore proceed to suppress it. If he does not have this competence, then he has to inform the competent ecclesiastical authority for the suppression<sup>43</sup>.

2. There are other movements whose charism is to be an element of renewal of the parish communities. The action of these movements is performed in the parishes (using the facilities, celebrating the Word and the Sacraments there). Because of this characteristic these principles should be kept in mind always by the movement, the bishop and by the parish priest:

1) The parish, unless it is limited by personal criteria, is for all the faithful who reside in the territory of the parish. All the faithful, young or old, men and women, sick or healthy should feel at home in the parish. All constitute the same community in which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are celebrated.

---

<sup>42</sup> Cf. can. 394 § 1. This canon calls the diocesan bishop to make compatible diversity and unity in the apostolate. For a deeper understanding of the relationship between unity and diversity in the Church, see CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter *Communio in notio*, 28 May 1992, n. 15-16. See also E. CAPARROS, *Unity and Diversity: the Challenge of Ecclesial Movements*, in *Il concetto di diritto canonico. Storia e prospettive* (ed. C.J. Errázuriz and L. Navarro), Milano 2000, p. 329-343.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. can. 305, 320 and 326.

2) The parish cannot become the parish of a specific group even though the group is essentially good. The movement which wants to renew the parish cannot absorb the community. The spirituality of the movement cannot be imposed on all the members of the parish community. If it was then some faithful would see their spiritual freedom (proclaimed in can. 214) offended or would be obliged to transfer to another parish. This is not always possible, especially in rural areas.

3) The liturgy in a parish should be open to all those who want to participate. The liturgical life of the parish cannot depend on the liturgical requirements of the movement. If the movement needs some particular celebrations, this can be granted in respect of this main principle. This is especially important in the case of Sunday Masses, because the Sunday Mass is the expression of the parish as an “Eucharistic community” where every member of the community experiences in common what they share most deeply, even though there may be legitimate differences among themselves. The Pope has written this in his apostolic letter *Dies Domini*: «on Sunday, the day of gathering, small group Masses are not to be encouraged: it is not only a question of ensuring that parish assemblies are not without the necessary ministry of priests, but also of ensuring that the life and unity of the Church community are fully safeguarded and promoted»<sup>44</sup>.

Because in some concrete cases there have been problems with liturgical celebrations, some Bishops have given the following norms: Masses for a concrete group cannot be celebrated in the parishes on Sunday but on week days, and cannot be closed to other faithful, and more important, that only a Paschal Vigil can be celebrated in the parish<sup>45</sup>.

4) The canonical position of the parish priest, with his rights and duties in the parish community and in its structure, and his role in Liturgy, has to be always respected<sup>46</sup>.

5) If the parish priest has admitted, with the consent of the Bishop, an ecclesial movement in the parish, then he has to respect it, and cannot pretend to change its aims, spirituality, etc. The role that the *Directory of the life and ministry of the priests* assigns to the parish priest is significant: «in his continuous concern for the common good in the Church, [he] will encourage associations of the faithful and movements, embracing them

---

<sup>44</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, 31 May 1998, n. 36. «Authorization of possible and clearly restricted exceptions to this general guideline will depend upon the wise discernment of the Pastors of the particular Churches, in view of special needs in the area of formation and pastoral care, and keeping in mind the good of individuals or groups — especially the benefits which such exceptions may bring to the entire Christian community».

<sup>45</sup>On this topic some Italian dioceses have given some rules and some bishops have written pastoral letters. These materials can be found in *Il Regno Documenti*, 9/1996, p. 298-299; and in *Il Regno Documenti*, 5/1997, p. 162-164.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. can. 519, 521, 527-535.

all, and helping them to find among themselves a unity of goals, prayer and apostolic action»<sup>47</sup>.

### 3. Movements without diocesan approval

When an ecclesial movement has not yet obtained any juridical recognition or approval, it can find itself in very special situation. Before answering the question if their activity in a diocese is legitimate or not, there need to be asked a previous question: why the movement does not have any approval? If it is because the movement is in the first stages of its life, and the ecclesiastical authority is informed and accompanying the movement in these first steps, then the activity is legitimate<sup>48</sup>. But if they do not have an approval because they have refused to ask for it, then their activity could be illegitimate.

### 4. Movements with approval from ecclesiastical authorities other than the diocesan bishop

A different situation is that of a movement who has already been approved by another bishop<sup>49</sup>, or by the Conference of Bishops or by the Holy See. Can a bishop

---

<sup>47</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Directory on the ministry and life of priests*, 31 January 1994, n. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Several Conferences of Bishops have affirmed explicitly the legitimate existence and activity of associations without having received any formal act of recognition or approval. Usually they are called *de facto* associations. For instance the Canadian Bishops state: «If every member of the faithful then has the right to establish and direct an association, the responsible authority in the ecclesial community reserves to itself the right to intervene when the members of an association or those in charge of it desire to acquire official status in the community. No association is, however, bound to seek such status. In the Church there can be associations of the faithful which are recognized as such and others which are not: however, these latter are *de facto* associations». CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS, COMMISSION FOR RELATIONS WITH ASSOCIATIONS OF PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY, *Recognition of National Catholic associations. Guidelines for the CCB and Associations of the Faithful*, Ottawa 1992 p. 8. The Italian Conference of Bishops has acknowledged: a) that these entities are brought into existence by the free agreement of the wills of the faithful; b) that they are legitimate in the Church; c) that they have some rights (for instance to ask the recognition from the ecclesiastical authority) and obligations; d) that they are subject to the pastoral care and the vigilance of the ecclesiastical authority, and therefore there are some specific duties for the association (like the one stating that after the elections the association must communicate the ecclesiastical authority the names of the new leaders); and e) that they can receive the title of “Catholic”. CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA. COMMISSIONE EPISCOPALE PER IL LAICATO, Nota pastorale, *Le aggregazioni laicali nella Chiesa*, 29 April 1993, n. 25, in *Notiziario della CEI*, 1993, , p. 83-119. For a commentary on this document, see L. NAVARRO, *Il carattere ecclesiale delle associazioni dei fedeli (a proposito della Nota pastorale della CEI “Le aggregazioni laicali nella Chiesa”)*, in *Ius Ecclesiae*, 6 (1994), 281-303. On this topic cfr. IDEM, *El derecho de asociación de los fieles y la autoridad eclesiástica*, in *La dimensión de servicio en el gobierno de la Iglesia* (ed. A. Viana), Pamplona 1999, p. 226-230.

<sup>49</sup> As Read has written: «It should be noted that approval given for an association by a diocesan bishop within his diocese grants that association the same status throughout the world. An Association whose statutes have been reviewed by the Diocesan Bishop in its place of foundation or accorded juridical personality, does not need to repeat the process each time it is established in another diocese. The bishop in the new location has no right to insist on reviewing the statutes, nor can refuse to accept their juridical personality accorded by his brother bishop». G. F. READ, *The Canonical Status of Ecclesial Movements*, in

decide to not allow the movement to be present in the diocese? Certainly yes, he can forbid that group in his diocese, but there must be grave reasons. In fact, if other ecclesiastical authorities have already made the discernment of the charism and of the movement, their approval means that the movement is for the good of the whole Church. Therefore it is difficult to impede the activity of this group in a specific diocese<sup>50</sup>, especially when the approval was given by the Holy See.

## 6. Other issues related to ecclesial movements

### 1. Incardination movements and the formation of candidates to the priesthood.

#### a) *Incardination*

In new ecclesial movements there are priests, deacons and seminarians. >From the canonical point of view, the presence of a priest as a member in an association is not a problem, because secular clerics have a right to associate<sup>51</sup>. In fact, being a member of a movement can constitute enrichment for the priestly life and also for the presbyterium of a diocese. Nevertheless, as the Roman Pontiff has recently indicated, some negative aspects can appear because of this presence of priests in the movement: the confusion between the priest and the lay person, without respecting their different roles they have in the Church, can lead to a clericalization of the movement or to a laicization of the clerics<sup>52</sup>.

---

*CLSG&I Newsletter*, n. 109 (March-1997), p. 43-44. Quoted by E. CAPARROS, *Unity and Diversity: the Challenge of Ecclesial Movements*, cit., p. 340.

<sup>50</sup> A good example of this is what was stated in the publication in the AAS of the Letter of John Paul II to Msgr. Cordes on the Neo-catechumenal Way. In a footnote it was said: «The intent of the Holy Father, in recognizing the Neo-catechumenal way as a valid itinerary of catholic formation, is not to provide binding indications to the local Ordinaries, but to encourage them to look attentively to the Neo-catechumenal communities, nevertheless leaving them free to act according to the particular pastoral demands of each diocese». The original text in Italian is this: «La mente del Santo Padre, nel riconoscere il Cammino Neocatecumenale come valido itinerario di formazione cattolica, non è di dare indicazioni vincolanti agli Ordinari del luogo, ma soltanto di incoraggiarli a considerare con attenzione le Comunità Neocatecumenali, lasciando tuttavia al giudizio degli stessi Ordinari di agire secondo le esigenze pastorali delle singole diocesi». JOHN PAUL II, *Lettera autografa del Sommo Pontefice Giovanni Paolo II a S.E. Mons. Paul Josef Cordes*, 30 August 1990, in AAS 82 (1990), p. 1513. See also some interventions of Italian Bishops, in *Il Regno Documenti*, 15/1995, p. 493; *Il Regno Documenti*, 9/1996, p. 298-299; and in *Il Regno Documenti*, 5/1997, p. 162-164.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. can. 278. On this right of clerics, cf. R. RODRÍGUEZ OCAÑA, *Las asociaciones de clérigos en la Iglesia*, Pamplona 1989.

<sup>52</sup> «With these premises, the priests who belong to ecclesial movements will find in them an opportunity for their spiritual and pastoral enrichment. Indeed, by belonging to them, priests can learn better how to live the Church in the rich experience of her sacramental, hierarchical and charismatic gifts, that correspond to the many forms of ministries, states of life and tasks by which she is built up. "Moved" and "attracted" by the same charism, sharing in the same history and belonging to the same group, priests and lay people share in an interesting experience of communion with the faithful who edify one another, but without ever losing their distinct identity. However, it would be a serious loss if we were to drift towards a

More problems can arise with the presence of priests who exercise their ministry in the service of the movement, because associations in the Latin Church do not have the faculty to incardinate, although this is possible through an apostolic privilege<sup>53</sup>.

Some authors have suggested that incardination should be granted to them<sup>54</sup>. Nevertheless, solutions that are actually put into practice are: a) creating a Society of Apostolic Life inside the movement, placed under the direction of a priest<sup>55</sup>; or, b) more often incardinating the priests of the movement into a particular Church. The inconvenience of this is that in some cases the incardination becomes a juridical fiction,

---

"clericalization" of the movements. It would also be harmful if the witness and ministry of priests were in some way to be blurred and gradually assimilated to the lay state. The priest must live within a movement as an outstanding presence of Christ, Head and Shepherd, minister of the Word of God and of the sacraments, educator in the faith, by means of his link with the bishop, over and above the functions and offices he is called to assume. Indeed, the growth of movements in that "ecclesial maturity" can depend on their contribution, as I recalled in the cited Pentecost meeting of 1998». JOHN PAUL II, *Message to Card. Stafford, on the occasion of the Theological Pastoral Convention on the theme: "Ecclesial movements for the new evangelization", on the initiative of the Focolari Movement*, 21 June 2001, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 June 2001, p. 7. (English [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20010627\\_stafford\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010627_stafford_en.html)).

<sup>53</sup> Even if during the drafting process of the CIC there was a moment in which the faculty to incardinate was to be granted to the clerical associations (those were missionary associations), the solution given to some Societies of common life (to place them as Societies of Apostolic Life), made so that the associations of the faithful do not have this faculty. On this topic see R. RODRÍGUEZ OCAÑA, cit., p. 238-279, and L. NAVARRO, *Commentary on can. 302*, in *Comentario exegético al Código de Derecho Canónico*, Pamplona 1996, vol. II, p. 441-443. The CIC does not even grant incardination to secular institutes. The CCEO has foreseen in can. 579 the possibility that the Holy See or the Patriarch could grant the faculty to incardinate to some associations.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. J. BEYER, *Vita associativa e corresponsabilità ecclesiale*, in *Vita consacrata*, 26 (1990), p. 940; IDEM, *I movimenti nuovi nella Chiesa*, cit., p. 70-71; G. GHIRLANDA, *Questioni irrisolte sulle associazioni dei fedeli*, in *Ephemerides Iuris canonici*, 49 (1993), p. 92-100; J.J. ETXEBERRÍA, *La consagración de vida en los movimientos eclesiales*, in *Informationes SCRIS*, 25 (1999), p. 134. These authors suggest that associations having the characteristics of universality and missionaryity should receive the faculty to incardinate their own clerics: «un'associazione o movimento ecclesiale, il cui carisma ha come nota propria l'universalità e l'attività missionaria, che è riconosciuta e approvata con l'erezione ad associazione pubblica dalla S. Sede, dovrebbe ottenere la facoltà di incardinare i propri chierici, per un miglior servizio apostolico e missionario a favore di tutta la Chiesa di Cristo, sia universale, sia particolare». G. GHIRLANDA, *Questioni irrisolte sulle associazioni dei fedeli*, cit. p. 96. On this issue, see also, E. ZANETTI, *Movimenti ecclesiali e Chiese locali*, in *Quaderni di diritto ecclesiale*, 11 (1998), p. 46. Nevertheless the incardination could lead, as Feliciani has pointed out, to some serious problems like the fact that a woman could not be the president of an association with the faculty of incardination, and the danger of "clericalization" of the movement, because there will be the tendency of the clerics to become the guides of the movement. Cf. G. FELICIANI, *Quel statut canonique pour les nouvelles communautés?* in *L'année canonique*, 42 (2000), p. 163.

<sup>55</sup> See S. PANIZZOLO, *Seminari e movimenti, gruppi, associazioni, cammini ecclesiali*, in *Seminarium*, 1990, p. 282-283. For the case of Comunione e Liberazione see P. SOTTOPIETRA, *Sacerdoti e movimenti. La realtà della Fraternità Sacerdotale dei Missionari di San Carlo Borromeo*, in *Sacrum Ministerium*, 6 (2001), p. 64-73, where the relationship between the Fraternity of Comunione e Liberazione and the Fraternità sacerdotale is duly described.

because the priest is not present in the diocese and does not serve the diocese<sup>56</sup>. A conflict is created because it seems reasonable that the priest incardinated in a diocese should serve in it, however, the movement also needs the presence of priests for their apostolic activity. The solution is to establish contracts between the diocese and the movement. These agreements foresee the lending of the priest to serve the movement in their activities, after he has served the diocese for a set amount of years<sup>57</sup>.

About these priests the *Directory on the life and ministry of priests* states: «The priests, then, incardinated in a Diocese, who are serving an ecclesial movement approved by the competent ecclesiastical Authority, are aware of being members of the presbyterate of their Diocese and must sincerely collaborate with it. The Bishop of incardination, on his part, must respect the way of life required by the membership to a Movement, and it may be fitting, by the norm of the law, to permit the priest to lend his services to other Churches, if this forms part of the charism of the movement itself»<sup>58</sup>.

#### b) The formation of candidates to the priesthood

Regarding the vocations to the priesthood it is already normal that many candidates for Orders come from ecclesial movements. In relation to these vocations there are different juridical situations: first, the candidates enter into the diocesan seminaries to become diocesan priests. Concerning their relationship with the movement, the Pope has declared: «young people who have received their basic formation in such groups and look to them for their experience of the Church should not feel they are being asked to uproot

---

<sup>56</sup> This kind of formal incardination in which the priest is really serving the movement in the place and ministry where he is told by the movement, lead to some questions: for instance, what happens when there are problems between the cleric and the movement? Who has to guarantee the due sustenance? Who has the responsibility to help the priest to be faithful to the priesthood?, etc.

<sup>57</sup> Marchesi is particularly critical to this solution: «se si vuole spingere all'eccesso le cose, si può immaginare un futuro in cui associazioni sacerdotali di questo tipo (che una volta ammesse possono assumere le più svariate fisionomie) contrattano a pari con i Vescovi per il servizio dei 'loro' sacerdoti diocesani e, magari, li 'ricattano'. Quando i 'gruppi' sono organizzati diventano inevitabilmente 'luoghi' di potere reale». M. MARCHESI, *Associazioni clericali e sacerdotali*, in *L'Amico del Clero*, 79 (1997), p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. n. 26. In footnote of this text, canon 271 is recalled. In it is spoken of *transmigratio*: the pastoral service of a cleric in a different diocese without changing incardination. This solution has received some critics: «Actualmente la incardinación de los miembros clérigos viene realizada a través de una ficción jurídica que consiste en el acuerdo escrito entre un obispo benévolo y los moderadores del movimiento para que el clérigo esté al servicio del movimiento. En cuanto se trata de un acuerdo más bien formal que jurídico, puesto que no está previsto en el Código, se plantearían una serie de dificultades en la hipótesis que al cambio de obispo el nuevo Ordinario no fuese propenso a mantener esta incardinación ficticia». J.J. ETXEBERRÍA, *La consagración de vida en los movimientos eclesiales*, cit., p. 134. Zadra retains that the agreement does not have any juridical value: «non avendo però tale accordo un valore giuridico, ovviamente esso dipende dalla benevolenza del vescovo, che potrebbe cambiare con l'arrivo nella diocesi di un nuovo pastore, oppure — se impellenti necessità della diocesi richiedessero l'aiuto di più sacerdoti — potrebbe venir meno». B. ZADRA, *Tipologie ed esemplificazioni dei diversi movimenti*, cit., p. 23. It is true that the CIC does not deal with this kind of agreements, but this is not enough to deprive them from any juridical value. The dictum "*Pacta sunt servanda*", typical of Natural Law, is also in force in Canon Law and not all Canon Law is in the Code of Canon Law.

themselves from their past or to break their links with the environment which has contributed to their decision to respond to their vocation, nor should they erase the characteristic traits of the spirituality which they have learned and lived there in all that they contain that is good, edifying and rich»<sup>59</sup>.

Therefore seminarians should be allowed and also encouraged to keep these links. The Seminary should provide the formation that will enlarge the outlook of these seminarians to all the ecclesial realities.

In recent decades some Bishops have established “diocesan seminaries” for candidates of a single movement or group. This has been foreseen as a solution for the problem of these candidates who wanted not only to keep a relation with the movement but also become priests *at the service of the charism of the movement*, and therefore needing to receive the formation to the priesthood in the same movement.

The juridical status of these seminaries is as follows:

At the request of the movement, a diocesan bishop establishes a seminary (a public juridical person, who acts in the name of the Church, whose goods are ecclesiastical goods): this seminary is called a “missionary seminary”. The bishop appoints a rector and also formators who are suggested by the leaders of the movement. The movement then determines when a candidate is suitable for the priesthood.

This solution can present serious problems in the Church:

It can become difficult for the diocesan bishop to exercise his power in the Seminary, because of the role of the movement in the governance of the Seminary<sup>60</sup>. The legislation on seminaries attributes fundamental roles to the bishop: he establishes the seminary (can. 237), he appoints the rector and other formators, he is the one who admits the candidates in the seminary (can. 241), he institutes the ministries of lector and acolyte, and he is the one who has the final decision about the ordination (can. 1029)<sup>61</sup>, he is the

---

<sup>59</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Ap. ex. *Pastores dabo vobis*, 25 March 1992, n. 68. For an interesting commentary about this flexibility in the Seminary formation, see M. CAMISASCA, *I seminaristi provenienti dalle realtà aggregative (riflessioni in margine al n. 68 della “Pastores dabo vobis”)*, in *Seminarium*, 32 (1992), p. 622-628.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. B. ESPOSITO, *Un nuovo tipo di seminario? I seminari diocesani missionari Redemptoris Mater*, in *Quaderni di diritto ecclesiale*, 12 (1999), p. 114.

<sup>61</sup> «It is the task of *the bishop or the competent superior* not only to examine the suitability and the vocation of the candidate but also to recognize it. This ecclesiastical element is inherent in a vocation to the priestly ministry as such. The candidate to the priesthood should receive his vocation not by imposing his own personal conditions, but accepting also the norms and conditions which the Church herself lays down, in the fulfillment of her responsibility.» JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 35. On the legislation on Seminaries, see D. CITO, *Annotazioni canonistiche in tema di seminari maggiori*, in *Ius Ecclesiae*, 7 (1995), p. 257-275.

one who gives also the rule of the seminary (can. 243) and he is at the centre of every diocesan seminary (cf. can. 259)<sup>62</sup>.

If the Bishop has all these functions it is because the training of seminarians is considered a fundamental task of her mission by the Church. The Church is forming her future ministers. This can never be considered as a private issue of a group, association, movement<sup>63</sup>. This explains why there is a *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis sacerdotalis* given by the Holy See and why the Conferences of Bishops can issue also the *Rationes* of each Country. These norms will be binding all seminaries in the Church or in a specific country. It is the Church officially who assumes the training of priests and regulates it (cf. can. 232-264), and the Church wants that those involved in this duty should be really well prepared: academically, pastorally, and spiritually.

If the diocesan bishop is not allowed to govern his own seminary according to the law of the Church, he should not establish it. Otherwise he will neglect his duties.

## 2. The movement and consecrated life

### a) *Membership in a movement*

The first thing to consider with regards to the presence of consecrated life in ecclesial movements, is that members of a religious institute or of a secular institute desire to participate in the life, activities or even become a member of the movement. They, as faithful, also have a right of association<sup>64</sup>. The Pope recognizes this fact: «In recent years, many consecrated persons have become members of one or other of the

---

<sup>62</sup> *Pastores dabo vobis* underlines the importance of the Bishop in the seminary: «The first representative of Christ in priestly formation is the bishop. (...) As for "being with him", with the bishop, the bishop should make a point of visiting them often and in some way "being" with them as a way of giving significant expression to his responsibility for the formation of candidates for the priesthood. The presence of the bishop is especially valuable, not only because it helps the seminary community live its insertion in the particular church and its communion with the pastor who guides it, but also because it verifies and encourages the pastoral purpose which is what specifies the entire formation of candidates for the priesthood. In particular, with his presence and by his sharing with candidates for the priesthood all that has to do with the pastoral progress of the particular church, the bishop offers a fundamental contribution to formation in the "sensus ecclesiae", as a central spiritual and pastoral value in the exercise of the priestly ministry» (n. 65). «The seminary is, in itself, an original experience of the Church's life. In it the *bishop is present* through the ministry of the rector and the service of co-responsibility and communion fostered by him with the other teachers, for the sake of the pastoral and apostolic growth of the students» (n. 60).

<sup>63</sup> Marchesi is also critical to this solution: «proviamo ad immaginare la formazione di sacerdoti diocesani, sradicata dall'alveo istituzionale e messa in balia di associazioni libere che possono contrapporsi tra loro e creare propri 'modelli' di presbiteri diocesani, che poi mettono 'a disposizione' per i Vescovi!». M. MARCHESI, *Associazioni clericali e sacerdotali*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. can. 307 § 3.

ecclesial movements which have spread in our time. From these experiences, those involved usually draw benefit, especially in the area of spiritual renewal»<sup>65</sup>.

But the Roman Pontiff also points out some problems:

«Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that in certain cases this involvement causes uneasiness and disorientation at the personal or community level, especially when these experiences come into conflict with the demands of the common life or of the Institute's spirituality. It is therefore necessary to take care that membership in these ecclesial movements does not endanger the charism or discipline of the Institute of origin, and that all is done with the permission of Superiors and with the full intention of accepting their decisions»<sup>66</sup>.

b) *The movement source of vocations for institutes of consecrated life*

A different situation is when a member of an ecclesial movement discovers his/her vocation to consecrated life in a specific institute. In this case, it has been established that the candidate should sever the ties with the ecclesial movement which lead him or her to enter the religious life<sup>67</sup>. The reason for this is found in the essential role of the religious spirituality for all the members of the institute. It is so fundamental that anything that can hinder it should be avoided.

c) *“Consecrated life” in the movement*

A third issue is the presence of a nucleus of “consecrated life” in an ecclesial movement<sup>68</sup>. In some cases the leading members, the core of the movement, desire to profess the three evangelical counsels. To determine if this should be allowed it should be examined if this is linked to the charism. Is the Holy Spirit guiding the movement in that direction? If God wants the presence of men and women who live a celibate life and are

---

<sup>65</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Ap. ex. *Vita Consecrata*, 25 March 1996, n. 56.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. C. FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Normae directivae *Potissimum institutioni*, 2 February 1990, n. 93: «In order to retain a positive relationship between these movements and religious institutes, and all the more so because numerous religious vocations have come from these movements, it is important to reflect upon the following requirements and the concrete consequences which these involve for members of these institutes. (...) candidates for the religious life who have come from one or other of these ecclesial movements place themselves freely under the authority of the superiors and formators legitimately commissioned for their formation when they enter the novitiate. Therefore they cannot simultaneously be dependent upon someone apart from the institute to which they now pertain, even though they belonged to this movement before their entrance. This is a matter of the unity of the religious institute and the unity of life of its novices».

<sup>68</sup> Beyer has adopted an extreme position considering that all ecclesial movements should have this consecrated life: «Essenziale è il fatto della vita consacrata in essi. In effetti, sia agli inizi di un movimento sia nella sua evoluzione, la vita consacrata mediante i consigli evangelici ha assunto un'importanza vitale per la loro esistenza, il loro influsso e la loro posizione nella Chiesa». J. BEYER, *I movimenti nuovi nella Chiesa*, cit., p. 64.

moved to embrace the evangelical counsels, this is perfectly legitimate (even though it is not possible to call it properly consecrated life<sup>69</sup>).

When the canon lawyer is confronted by a founder or moderator with the request of including in the Statutes a section dedicated to this "consecrated life" in the movement, he should ask why he or she is suggesting that a group should profess the evangelical counsels. If the answer is because it will lead these members to be more dedicated to the movement and therefore would be a way of assuring the survival of the movement, then it should be taken into account that these vows are not needed to guarantee the continuity. What is needed is the real and total dedication of the members: their vocation and mission will lead some of them not to get married and to be full-time at the service of the movement, without having to profess the evangelical counsels.

If the request is based on the understanding that for living a true Christian life the profession of the evangelical counsels should be present in the movement, then the canon lawyer should remind that the first criterion of ecclesiality of every movement in the Church is to seek holiness in its members, not their profession of the evangelical counsels<sup>70</sup>.

This holiness, which is based on the reality of Baptism, constitutes such an urgent need for the whole Church in this third Millennium that the Pope wants to «place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness»<sup>71</sup>.

---

<sup>69</sup> Dealing with the assumption of evangelical counsels in ecclesial movements, Etxeberría affirms: «En conclusión, las asociaciones o movimientos eclesiales constituyen una verdadera forma de consagración de vida con la asunción de los consejos evangélicos desde una vocación personal y comunitaria fundada en un carisma originario. En ellas se dan los elementos esenciales del c. 573 § 1, aunque se trata de una consagración de vida distinta de los institutos de vida consagrada y de las sociedades de vida apostólica». J.J. ETXEBERRÍA, *La consagración de vida en los movimientos eclesiales*, cit., p. 122. See also G. GHIRLANDA, *Charism and Juridical Status of the Ecclesial Movements*, cit., p. 135-140. Certainly there is a need to study further the difference between the consecrated life and the assumption of the evangelical counsels in the ecclesial movements. It is significant that this need is stressed by the editor's foot note in the opening of the article of Etxeberría, because the editor of the journal is the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (*Informationes SCRIS*, 25 [1999], p. 114).

<sup>70</sup> To understand holiness is the main task of the Church in this Millennium: «It is necessary therefore to rediscover the full practical significance of Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, dedicated to the "universal call to holiness"». JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 30, 6 January 2001.

<sup>71</sup> He is deeply convinced that, «since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few "uncommon heroes" of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual». JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 31.

### 3. Mixed communities

Related to this reality is the experience of some movements who foster the building up of mixed communities of married people, with their children, living together with priests, celibate men and women, all under the guidance of the president of the community and living in the same house. In certain cases, the life in these communities looks like a new way of imitating the monastic life, in which all is shared (prayer, apostolate, work, resources, etc.).

In these cases, some measures of prudence should be suggested by the canon lawyer who has to give orientation to the movement. With regard to the families living in these communities, the canon lawyer has to guarantee that in the Statutes and By-laws, the identity and mission of the family are duly respected. The autonomy and independence of the family must be protected, because each Christian family is a fundamental cell of society<sup>72</sup>, and, in the Church, every family is called to be a domestic church<sup>73</sup>, where virtues are taught and lived. The right to property, to emigrate, to have initiative in economic affairs, to work, etc., are typical rights of the family and should be guaranteed, because their exercise allow the family to fulfill her mission in society and in the Church<sup>74</sup>. All these elements will allow each family to be a “sovereign society”<sup>75</sup>, in which freedom and responsibility are taught.

The first measure that should be taken is to make sure that the rights and duties of the family and the nature of family relationships are respected in the movement and in the Statutes. The parents cannot delegate in the movement or in the superior of the community house their rights and duties regarding the education of their children. This means that parents have to assume the immediate responsibility in all that deals with raising their children<sup>76</sup>.

Secondly all the economical duties of the family rely on the parents and other members of the family (they have to provide for the spiritual and material needs of their children<sup>77</sup>). Therefore, they cannot be an economical burden for the movement and parents should be aware that they cannot deprive their children of the goods that they have the right to receive, because of the poverty they are requested to live by the movement. All inheritance rights established by civil law should be always respected.

---

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2207.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2204.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Ex.ap. *Familiaris consortio*, 22 November 1981, n. 46.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the families*, 2 February 1994, n. 17.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. can 226.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2228.

Third, the life in the community that the spouses live cannot be an obstacle to their family and conjugal life: if their love fades because of the movement, they would be forgetting that their marriage is the vocation that God wants for them, a vocation to holiness based on a sacrament. They would be giving priority to the movement and their marriage would be in second place.

## 7. Conclusion

We have examined what ecclesial movements are and also what are the main juridical problems that are present in them. If all of us are now a bit more aware that Canon Law has a task to perform in relation to these realities and that we should try to find the best juridical configuration for each movement, then we can be sure that we are contributing to reach the stage of maturity in the communion of the Church, to which the Roman Pontiff is calling the movements. I would like to conclude recalling some of his words in the last apostolic letter, *Novo millennio ineunte*: «another important aspect of communion is the promotion of forms of association, whether of the more traditional kind or the newer ecclesial movements, which continue to give the Church a vitality that is God's gift and a true "springtime of the Spirit". Obviously, associations and movements need to work in full harmony within both the universal Church and the particular Churches, and in obedience to the authoritative directives of the Pastors. But the Apostle's exacting and decisive warning applies to all: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything and hold fast what is good" (1 Th 5:19-21)»<sup>78</sup>.

In these words the role of Canon Law and of canon lawyers at the service of the ecclesial movements in the Church of the Third Millennium can be found.

---

<sup>78</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 46.