



MARY'S KENOTIC LIFE: THE PROTOTYPE OF THE CONSECRATED
LIFE OF THE LCU SISTERS

SR. BOONMEE KHAMCHALEE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY
BANGKOK, THAILAND

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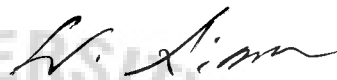
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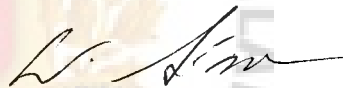
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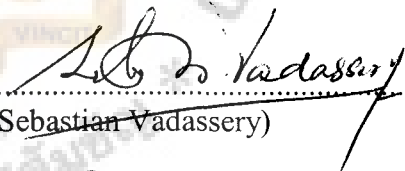


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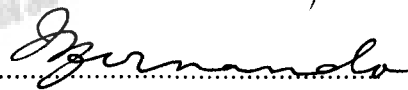
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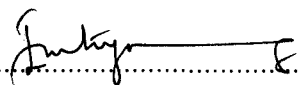
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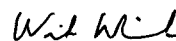
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**Thesis Title : Mary's *Kenotic* Life: the Prototype of the Consecrated Life
of the LCU Sisters**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies Mary's *kenotic* life (self-emptying) as the ideal of consecrated life led by the LCU Sisters, in the Thai Christian context. It is exceedingly meaningful and consequential to the Sisters in their self-emptying (*kenosis*) process, to be filled with the power of God. The life of Mary is the pattern of life for all Christians particularly for those who have committed their lives to follow Jesus single-heartedly. Mary, a humble Jewish woman, who trusted in Yahweh, was called to be the mother of the promised messiah. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1: 38), was the response of Mary to Yahweh's call. She was a woman of lively faith, unconditional love and trusting hope. Her total, constant, unqualified and absolute surrender to the Divine will in humility is the model for consecrated life.

This research shows how Mary is the highest ideal of the LCU Sisters in developing their feminine personality and in their unstinting personal self-giving of themselves to the co-sisters and the people of God at large. The persons committed to

God in His Church are known as “Religious.” They live a life of faith, hope and charity in the realization of God’s Kingdom within and its actualization on this earth. Consecrated life is a life in imitation of Mary to be sensitive to God’s presence in the world in the face of various challenges of such a life.

The vows, the LCU Sisters take, of obedience, virginity and poverty are in response to a radical renunciation, *kenosis*. The evangelical counsel is living the theological virtues of faith, hope and love in commitment to God and His people especially the *anawim*—the poor of Yahweh. Like Mary, the Sisters sustain their daily lives by immersing themselves in silent communion with God in prayer. Thus following in the footsteps of Mary, the Sisters fulfill the meaning of their lives “proclaiming with Mary the greatness of the Lord.”



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

I. Sacred Scripture

A. Old Testament

Gen	:	Genesis
Isa	:	Isaiah
Jer	:	Jeremiah
Josh	:	Joshua
Lev	:	Leviticus
Ps	:	Psalms

B. New Testament

Acts	:	Acts of the Apostles
Col	:	Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians
1Cor	:	First letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians
2Cor	:	Second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians
Eph	:	Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
Gal	:	Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians
Heb	:	Letter to the Hebrews
Jas	:	Letter of St. James
Jn	:	Gospel of St. John
1Jn	:	First letter of St. John
Lk	:	Gospel of St. Luke

Mk	:	Gospel of St. Mark
Mt	:	Gospel of St. Matthew
Phil	:	Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians
1Pet	:	First Letter of Peter
Rom	:	Letter of St. Paul to the Romans
1Tim	:	First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy

II The Teaching of the Church

CCC	:	Catechism of the Catholic Church
LG	:	Lumen Gentium
PC	:	Perfectae Caritatis
PI	:	Potissimum Institutioni
RM	:	Redemptoris Mater
VC	:	Vita Consecrata

III Others

Cons	:	Constitutions of the LCU Sisters
LCU	:	Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross of Ubonratchatani

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background and Significance of Study

Thailand is a land of freedom.¹ It had never been colonized. Buddhism plays a very significant role in the daily lives of the Thai people. About 95 % of the people in the kingdom of Thailand are Buddhists. Christians are only a tiny minority, about 1.4 % of a population of 65 million. Buddhism in Thailand is a conglomeration of Buddhist and animistic beliefs and practices fused together through the millennia, on the long road to modern nationhood. Buddhism is a profound and sophisticated faith, perhaps more a philosophy than a religious faith. Yet, for common people, it is a religion and its adoption by the early Thai kingdoms was the single most important event in Thai civilization.

The constitution guarantees all Thai citizens the freedom to choose the religion they like. His Majesty the King is the patron of all religions. Christian schools and social welfare works are appreciated by the Thai people and the government. Slowly the Christian communities are growing in strength and influence through the elapse of time. The Second Vatican Council has initiated reforms in various aspects of Christian life, such as the initiation of inter-religious dialogue, liturgy, ecumenism, with particular emphasis on inculturation, family life and care for the youth. These are steps towards making the Church the salt of the earth in Thailand.

¹ The word "Thai" means free (Chadchaidee, 1994, p. 100).

Thai culture at present is at the crossroads of change and the Church must be the catalyst in facilitating the process of birth of a new era. The Second Vatican Council expressed the hope that Christian Religious communities should be living signs of the Church in communicating the Good News of the Gospel in a language that is intelligible and acceptable to the people of today. The council exhorts the religious communities to renew themselves and to immerse themselves in all aspects of the Church's evangelization.

Pope John Paul II said, "Religious life is a gift from God to the Church and to the World by the Holy Spirit" (*Vita Consecrata*, 1996 p.11). Being part of the Church, the different religious communities have different roles to play in shaping the new society. The Pope desires that the ordained ministers of the Church and Religious communities in Asia should live and work in a spirit of communion and cooperation with the Bishops and the faithful, bearing witness to the love which Jesus declared as the hallmark of his disciples (Jn.13: 35).

Vatican Council II encouraged all Religious Congregations² to go back to their original inspiration (charism) of the founders and renew their lives in accordance with their charism and spirituality. The Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross, founded by Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte in Vietnam in 1670, is making great effort in accordance with the original spirit of their founder to renew themselves in order to be effective instruments in bringing the "Good News" to Thailand and to the world at large.

² Religious Congregations are groups of Christians who commit their lives to God and live in communities promising to live the three evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty. These groups are approved by the Church and are engaged in a particular form of work like education care for the orphans, the sick, the poor, etc., to bring God's love into their lives. These groups are living signs of God's love.

1.2 The Congregation of the LCU³ Sisters.

Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte, the founder, had a vision in his early years while at Lisieux to establish a religious congregation with special devotion to Jesus on the Cross. Later during a 40-day retreat at Ayutthaya, this vision became clearer to establish a religious congregation. This inspiration was intensified and matured as he witnessed as a Bishop:

- (1) The slack in the religious faith and practices of Christians.
- (2) The unbecoming conduct of some of the missionaries working in the Far East.
- (3) The contemplative life of Thai Buddhist monks and their life of “Vinaya,” that earned them love and respect from the people.

These observations and his earlier vision gave birth to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross at Ayuthaya in 1672. Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte grouped together a number of women who wanted to lead a devout life in order to:

1. Contemplate the redemptive sufferings of Jesus Christ on the cross.
2. Continue to transform their lives into that of Christ, through contemplation, prayer and by the reception of the sacraments, and
3. Be visible signs of Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and humankind in this world by devoting themselves to the apostolate of compassion among the youth and women and to be the salt of the earth by promoting culture, social work, health, moral life and faith.

³ From now on the Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross established in Ubon, a city in North Eastern Thailand will appear in this paper as LCU Sisters.

In Ubonratchathani the Congregation was established by Rev. Father Jean Baptiste Prodhomme, one of the early French Missionaries in 1889. The Sisters came to be known as “The Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon” or LCU Sisters. The LCU Sisters are committed women, with a special devotion to Jesus on the Cross, and nourished by the spirit of the Congregation in cultivating the virtues of compassion, patience, love, sacrifice, humility and simplicity.

The traditions of the Congregation evolved over a hundred years into a simple and hardworking life style, living among the poor and the marginalized. They are devoted to Jesus who died on the Cross and learn from Him how to love and serve the people. Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte was a shining example of simplicity, humility and committed life. His example of generosity and readiness to share and help others gives the LCU Sisters strength to keep the spirit of the Congregation alive today. The Sisters, through the daily Eucharist, community life and personal prayer, practice virtues and care for one another. The continual inner communion with Jesus enlivens their consecrated lives.

At present, the LCU Sisters are working in seven provinces: Ubonratchathani, Amnatcharoen, Yasothon, Mahasarakam, Roi-et, Sisaket, and Nakornratchasima. There are 122 Sisters in the Congregation, 19 of whom have retired from active life, yet they support the younger members through prayer, sacrifice and exemplary life. Ninety-nine sisters are engaged in apostolic work among the parish churches and schools, and four are working as missionaries doing pastoral work and assisting the poor in Cambodia since 1991. Besides, there are eleven Novices and two Postulants.

In response to the needs of the Thai people, LCU Sisters have been involved in several fields of social work, such as the Center for women who are marginalized and

under-privileged in Ubon, other urban areas and surrounding villages, providing them with education and basic vocational training. These educational programs emphasize women's dignity, their spiritual and intellectual development, as well as income-generating occupations. Some LCU Sisters work with drug addicts, AIDS patients, orphans and single mothers.

The LCU Sisters find themselves at the crossroads of life in the emerging globalized world and changing modalities of life in the Church. They find themselves lost in the cacophony of ideas that are floating around them. The old, time-tested values seem to be irrelevant, and some of them feel uncertain, as if the carpet is pulled from under their feet. A number of them feel lost. To give meaning to their lives, they plunge themselves into activities, but this does not meet their need. They need a new and clear understanding of the emerging new world and the Church, to find their rightful place there in order to retrieve the joy of life in their calling. Mary, the *ancilla domini*—the handmaid of the Lord, who accepted God in her life, with all its consequences is the model of the LCU Sisters, that will bring joy and vibrancy to their consecrated lives. If they want to become the real “Lovers of the Cross” they should have the same spirit of self-emptying—*kenosis*—in their personal lives, as Jesus and his mother Mary had done through the blood-stained path of the Cross. The self-emptying—*kenosis*—brought much pain and suffering to Mary's life. It is the cost everyone has to pay to be a disciple of Christ. It is the royal road of the Cross that leads to ultimate glory.

1.3 Mary in the Renewal of the Congregation

Responding to the Second Vatican Council's injunction to all religious congregations to renew and update their lives and work, the LCU Sisters have revised their Constitutions⁴ several times. The spirit of the Congregation urges the Sisters to be women of love in their lives, to love the poor, and to love God as manifested in the person of Christ and in the life of Mary, and to assist the local Church, according to the charism and spirituality of the Founder with simplicity and humility. The Sisters are offered higher education and training in spirituality and in secular learning to make them fit instruments for the proclamation of the Good News of the Lord.

Mary is the ideal for all Christians—she is the preeminent Christian particularly for those who are called to lead the committed religious life like the LCU Sisters. She is the first and most perfect Christian who emptied herself of every thing and accepted the Gospel message and lived it, in all its fullness (Elio, 1973 P.146). She is the model of self-emptying (*kenosis*) when she accepted to be the mother of God incarnate, she emptied herself and surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit; she is the ideal for Religious sisters. Pope John Paul II wrote:

The relationship with Mary most holy, which, for every believer, stems from his or her union with Christ, is even more pronounced in the life of consecrated persons . . . Mary's presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person and for the solidity, unity and progress of the whole community (*Vita Consecrata*, 1996 p.46).

⁴ Constitutions of the Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon of Thailand were approved by the Bishop of Ubon diocese in 1999.

Mary is the sublime example of perfect consecration, through surrender to God and living a life totally devoted to Him. Pope Pius XII, asked all Christians to follow Mary's example by dedicating themselves to Mary. He wrote:

Consecration to the mother of God is a total gift of self, for the whole of life and for all eternity; and a gift which is not a mere formality, or sentimentality, but effectual, comprising the full intensity of the Christian life—Marian life.” This consecration, the Pope explained “tends essentially to the union with Jesus, under the guidance of Mary (Available at <http://www.rosary-center.org/consecrt.htm>).

In his introduction to the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, Pope John Paul II wrote about the place of Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church, saying,

The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation for when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' (cf. Gal 4: 4-6).

The Church upholds Mary as the Virgin Mother, who, faithful to her spouse and to God, yet conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. LG 64). Therefore the mystery of the virginity of Mary, her single-minded dedication to God is the model for the consecrated virginity (Cons. p. 33).

1.4 Research Questions

The questions asked in this thesis are: How did Mary's *kenotic* life witness to the Kingdom of God? How is Mary's *kenotic* life the example for the community life of LCU Sisters?

1.5 Thesis Statement

The Thesis claim of this research is that “Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, is the example of the *kenotic* life of the LCU Sisters in their fidelity to God and in the service of the *anawim*⁵ of God.”

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This research aims:

- 1) To study systematically the concept of *kenosis* and the Divine self-emptying.
2. To explain *kenosis* as exemplified in Mary.
- 3) To understand Mary’s *kenosis* as the Model for the LCU Sisters.

1.7 Literature Reviewed

Mary, the mother of Christ has been presented by Christian researchers and writers under various themes. I present here some of the important themes developed by researchers in line with the thesis’ claim. They are clustered under the following headings: A) Mary and the Kingdom of God, B) Mary, the Mother of Christ, C) Mary, the first Christian and D) Mary and Committed life.

A. Mary and the Kingdom of God

Hans Küng (1976) in *The Church* explains that the Church is the people of God and the Body of Christ, that accomplishes its mission to the entire world through the

⁵ *Anawim* is the plural form of the Old Testament Hebrew word, which is variously translated as “poor,” “afflicted,” “humble,” or “meek” of Yahweh. For the *anawim*, Yahweh is their sole inheritance.

Proclamation of the Good News and the service to the people of God. In *The Kingdom of God* John Fuellenbach (1989) understands that the Church is the Kingdom of God which Jesus initiated as the movement for liberation from the clutches of sin. The visible Church is not the Kingdom of God in its fullness, but the Kingdom of God is present in the Church. Mary, the mother of the Church continues to assist in the building of the Kingdom of God.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus said that those who do the will of God are His brother, sister, and mother (3:31-35) and belong to the Kingdom of God. Jesus, while dying on the Cross and seeing His mother standing by the beloved disciple, said to her, "Woman, behold thy son" (Jn 19: 26) and to the beloved disciple He said, "Behold thy mother" (Jn 19: 27). Jesus thus entrusted the Church to Mary's care. In Acts 2:1-11, Mary was with the early Church in the upper room when "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with tongues, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak".

Raniero Cantalamessa (1992) in *Mary the Mirror of the Church* sees Mary as a model of the Church. She is not simply a member of the Church like others but the very figure of the Church. She was involved personally in the three important Christian mysteries: the Incarnation⁶, Paschal⁷ and Pentecost⁸. The Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* states that Mary's two fundamental roles are as the Mother of Christ and

⁶ Incarnation means God became a human being in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.

⁷ Paschal refers to the passing over of the Hebrews from Egypt to the promised land. This occasion was marked by the Jewish feast also known as Paschal, celebrated by the sacrifice of a lamb. In the New Testament Jesus is the Paschal lamb who died for the salvation of all men.

⁸ Pentecost refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles after the Ascension of Jesus. The timid apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim fearlessly the Good News.

the figure of the Church. Mary, “The mother of God is the model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ”. Throughout her earthly life, she was a model of attentiveness to the Word of God, of prayer and of offering. Mary is not only an example for the whole Church in the exercise of divine worship but also a teacher of the spiritual life for individual Christians (LG 63).

B. Mary, the Mother of Christ

Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda (2002) in *The Seeker's Guide to Mary* explains that Mary is central to the beliefs of all Christians. She is a key figure in the divine story of salvation. Yet, Mary was a woman, a daughter, a wife and a mother. Mary is the mother of Christ, the Son of God. Church tradition teaches that Mary was preserved from original sin in view of God calling her to be the Mother of Christ. She was filled with grace beyond measure and fulfilled her role in a unique pilgrimage of faith, thus becoming the mother of the Church and spiritual mother of all people. Mary freely cooperated with God by responding, “Let it be done to me as you say” (Luke 1:38). By her unique cooperation with God's plan of salvation she also became a model of saying “yes” to God in individual lives.

In *Theotokos, Women, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God* Pope John Paul II (2001) points out that Mary is the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. The expression “Mother of God” is used as referring to the Word of God, who in the Incarnation assumed the lowliness of the human condition in order to raise man to divine sonship. Mary is the Mother of God not only because she carried Him in her womb but also because she first conceived Him in her heart in faith. Antone Nacheff (2000) in

Mary's: Pope John Paul II, Mary and the Church since Vatican II stresses that Mary is the Mother of the Redeemer, mother of divine grace and mother of the Church. With his great interest in the theme of redemption, Pope John Paul II calls our attention to Mary's involvement in the saving mission of her Son, beginning from the Annunciation where she consented to the plan of the Incarnation and received the divine Word through faith and obedience that came to her from on high. Mary is the virginal Mother of the Son, the immaculate spouse of the Holy Spirit as well as the exemplar in her faith, hope and charity. Joseph Marie Perrin (1978) in *Mary Mother of Christ and of Christian* mentions that St. John, in his Gospel, in two places: Cana and Calvary (Jn.2:1;19:25), where she is addressed as "the Mother of God." John speaks of Jesus as the Word of God and the Word made flesh. Mary is the Mother of the Word made flesh and is both virgin and mother. Through Mary, Jesus becomes the compassionate brother of those who He has come to save. Jesus is the Son of God who is also the Son of the Virgin Mary.

C. Mary, the First Christian

Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda (2002) in her book *Seeker's Guide to Mary* explains that Mary of Nazareth is clearly the first Christian. With her "yes" to the angel Gabriel, she was the first to welcome Jesus into her life, to acknowledge him as the Son of God. As the first person to say "yes" to Christ's presence in this world. Mary is a good example for mankind, particularly for Christians in living their human daily life. Mary did not say "yes" only once to God, her entire life was a testimony to living faithfully to the Word of God. In *Life of Mary* Franz Williams (1983) shows that Mary's faith was more perfect than that of any other human beings. Her entire life was an expression of her faith and her love.

Her faith inflamed her love; her love, in turn increased her faith. Anthony J, Tambasco (1984) in *What are They Saying about Mary* points out the most significant theological shifts that have affected Marian theology. Mary is shown, as the example of a perfect Christian. In early Mariology the emphasis was on Mary sharing in Christ's work of redemption. The focus now is that Mary as the perfect Christian is the model of contemplation of the Word of God, and apostolate, of priesthood and religious life, of laity and families. Jacques Bur (1994) in *How to Understand the Virgin Mary* observes that the Biblical reflections point to Mary as the Jewish woman who witnessed to the greatness of God with unflinching faith and sterling humanity. She was the conscientious and committed Jewish woman who sang of solidarity in her struggle with the poor and the oppressed in her *Magnificat*⁹.

D. Mary and Committed Life

In the book titled *St. Louis de Montfort: True Devotion to Mary* Eddie Doherty, (1994) affirms that consecration to Mary has a threefold spiritual reality: an internal dedication, an external service and a reorientation to eternal life. By the first, there is a reordering of heart, mind and spirit; by the second a reordering of word, deed and body; and by the third, a reordering of intention and destiny. He upholds that the spirit of Mary is the Spirit of God because she never acted by her own spirit but always by the Spirit of God. This perfect consecration to Mary is the religious life: the undertaking of the vow to observe poverty, chastity and obedience.

⁹ Magnificat (glorify) is a song which Mary sang in praise of God as she met her relative Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist).

Joyce Ridick (1984) in *Treasures in Earthen Vessels* reflects on three vows of religious life—poverty, chastity and obedience. As the religious seeks for a model of this radical self-surrender in love, they find Mary, whose “yes” to God is an example of obedience to the will of God. Mary’s obedience is the concrete expression of the unqualified response to let herself be conformed to Jesus even in His Passion. Thus Mary remained perfectly transparent to God’s word; ever faithful to be with Him, like Him, for Him. Her love was completely fulfilled. In *Consecration and Service* Elio Gambari (1973) mentions that Mary is the model of religious men and women who are consecrated to God and to follow Christ, the example of chastity and poverty, who redeemed and sanctified mankind by his obedience even to death on the Cross. These expressions, as in LG¹⁰ 46, point clearly to our Lady as the first religious, the first to follow Christ in the life that He chose, and by this very fact Mary is the model of every religious man and woman.

Pope Paul VI (1946) in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* explains that the religious should learn from Mary how to discover the signs of God’s will and recognize the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in any mission He chooses to entrust to them, and how this mission should be carried out to the end with generosity, constancy and courage. As virgin and mother, Mary is especially the model of religious women. Since she is the Mother of the Church, every Christian, and every religious will necessarily have a place for her in his/her life, and indeed his/her whole life should be permeated by her love. In *Vita Consecrata* Pope John Paul II (1996) states that the Virgin Mary, model of consecration and discipleship, is the model of the acceptance of grace by human creatures. In Mary, “the

¹⁰ Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church begins with the words *Lumen Gentium*—the Light of the People.

temple of the Holy Spirit”, all the splendor of the new creation shines forth. Consecration of life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son, and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the virginal and humble life of Christ also means imitation of Mary’s way of life. The Blessed Virgin shares with them the love which enables them to offer their everyday lives for Christ and to cooperate with Him in the salvation of the world. Thus the religious who are at the service of the Church will always feel the need to be for others—the human community.

1.8 The Important Contribution of this Thesis

This study is expected to be very valuable to the LCU Sisters in the renewal of their lives and presents in a vivid manner—Mary as model for the LCU Sisters by her *kenotic* life. I also consider this study important for contemporary Christians, particularly Thai Christians in their own process of *kenosis* that will enable them to be leaven in society. This study is expected to be significant in clarifying Mary’s place in the Church and in the Christian life and in promoting better understanding among Christians themselves and believers of other faiths.

This thesis is also expected to be very meaningful and consequential to the LCU Sisters following Mary in her self-emptying (*kenosis*) process and to be filled by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have to be faithful to God by following the example of Mary. I am delighted to present and share my understanding of Mary, a unique gift to humanity, and to all who want to live a committed contemplative religious life.

From the review of literature available to the researcher, no one so far has attempted to study the issue of Mary’s *kenotic* life (self-emptying) as the model for

Consecrated life especially for the life of LCU Sisters, in the Thai Christian context. The particular contribution of this thesis consists in explaining that “The Virgin Mother of Christ, whose life is a pattern for all Christians,” particularly the people who live committed lives like the LCU Sisters.

I think that Mary’s *kenosis* can be applied in the daily life of the LCU Sisters. The Sisters could learn from Mary how to empty themselves of the “self” in order to be filled with the power of Christ so that they can be living signs of Christ in the world. Through this study I hope to enliven among the LCU Sisters their call to the Founder’s charism and be filled by Christ through their self-emptying.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

This research limits itself to the *kenosis* of Mary as the model for the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon in the Thai Christian context.

1.10 Definition of the Terms

Apostolic life: is the life of those who carry on the mission entrusted to the apostles by Christ. The mission of Christ is to proclaim the Good News, to teach, to heal and to reconcile people with God, through the community of the Church.

Charism: *Charisma* in Greek means a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from God’s grace. This being so, charisms are many and are related to various services and functions of a particular group (Komonchak, 1991, p.180).

Consecrated Life: refers to a corporate form of Christian existence in which members of the Church gather together in common pursuit of the evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience (Brien, 1994, p. 681).

Kenosis: in Greek means emptying of oneself. St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ in whom God emptied himself to become a human being with all the limitations it entails. *Kenosis* is applicable to all those who empty themselves in order to be filled by God.

Vocation: refers to the divine call to undertake a particular style of life, to live a life of holiness and to live in community and to work for the extension of God's Kingdom.

Vows: refers to public promises made freely to God to live a radical Christian life through the observance of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

1.11 Methodology

This is an explorative-descriptive study. To achieve this goal, I will use the interpretative method. I will research from books, journals, unpublished materials like theses and lectures, handouts from competent professors and graduates. The Christian Scriptures, Church documents, Encyclicals,¹¹ Apostolic Exhortations and other official documents of the Church serve as major source of this study. Then I will reflect on these in connection with experiences gained through the years, to gain insight into *kenotic* life. These insights are used to write this research to show that Mary's life is the example for LCU Sisters in living a radical Christian and consecrated life and for witnessing,

¹¹ Encyclicals are letters written by the Popes to the Bishops of the world on topics which have a bearing on the faith and morals of the faithful.

dialoguing, building relationships with fellow men and finding joy in the service of the Lord and humanity.

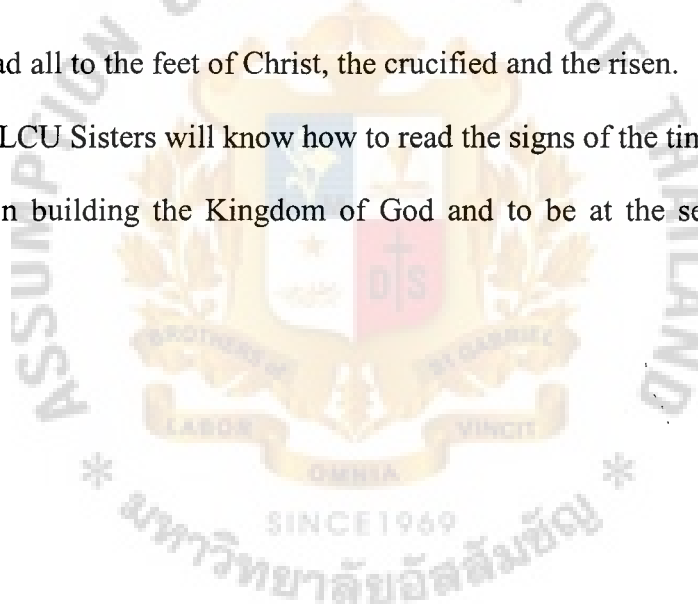
1.12. Expectations

From this research and the tentative conclusions, I hope to arrive at the following:

1) That the LCU Sisters will understand and be inspired by the charism of the Founder and to live joyful lives in the service of the Lord and humanity.

2) That the LCU Sisters can truly capture and relive the Spirit of Mary's *kenotic* experience in this contemporary world. Being living signs of *kenosis*, the LCU Sisters will be a guiding light to those who want to offer their lives for the service of God and humanity and to lead all to the feet of Christ, the crucified and the risen.

3) That the LCU Sisters will know how to read the signs of the time, so they can be good instruments in building the Kingdom of God and to be at the service of the Thai society.



CHAPTER II

KENOSIS AND THE DIVINE SELF-EMPTYING

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the origin and meaning of the word *kenosis* and its scriptural meaning and its theological ramification in Christian life. I also make references to similar notion in Buddhism and Islam.

2.2 The Meaning of *Kenosis*

“*Kenosis*” is derived from the Greek word “*Kenos*” meaning “empty or without effect” (Michael Downey, 1993, p. 584). *Kenosis*, in the religious sense, is emptying oneself or the ego self. In its full religious meaning, it refers to the renunciation of one’s will in total surrender to the Divine and, in the process, to be transformed in the core of one’s being. It is a continuous process, where one’s own self is removed and the Divine self takes its place. In this sense the Gospel tells us “Unless the wheat falls to the ground and dies, it cannot bring forth new life” (Jn 12: 24). Self-emptying is the first step in the ladder of spiritual rebirth. Some modern spiritual writers define *kenosis* as a process of self-transcendence for authentic conversion of heart. The term *kenosis* is used for the first time in the New Testament, in St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians 2: 5-11 where Paul states that Jesus emptied Himself when He took upon Himself the form of a man.

2.3 The Meaning of Emptiness in Buddhism

Buddhism does not talk about One Absolute God who is essentially transcendent to human beings. Instead, Buddhism teaches *pratītya-samutpāda*, or the law of

“dependent co-origination” or “conditional co-production” as the *Dharma*, or Truth. Nothing exists, independently, or can be said to be self-existing. Accordingly, in Buddhism all conditional things without exception are relative, relational, non-substantial and changeable. Even the Buddha does not exist by himself but is entirely interrelated to humans and nature. By this reason, Buddhism especially Mahayana cannot accept the monotheistic notion of One Absolute God as the ultimate reality, but instead advocates *sūnyatā* (emptiness) and *tathatā* (suchness or as-it-is-ness) as the ultimate reality.

Sūnyatā as the ultimate reality in Buddhism literally means “emptiness” or “voidness” and can imply “absolute nothingness”. In the realization of *sūnyatā*, not only sentient beings but also the Buddha, not only *samsāra* but also *nirvāna*, are without substance and are empty. Buddhism emphasizes awakening to *sūnyatā*, to the non-substantiality of everything, including self, in order to be emancipated from suffering. Thus it teaches no-self (*anātman*) and awakening to *Dharma* rather than faith in the Buddha. The Buddhist notion of *sūnyatā* should not be understood to indicate a static state of everything’s emptiness, but should be taken to signify the dynamic activity of emptying everything including itself. *Sūnyatā* in Mahayana Buddhism is no less than formless emptiness or boundless openness.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the dynamic identification of *samsāra* and *nirvāna* is realized at each and every moment by the clear realization of the emptiness of *nirvāna* (sacred time) as well as the emptiness of *samsāra* (secular time). The Buddhist notion of *sūnyatā* has two aspects: wisdom and compassion. In the wisdom aspect of *sūnyatā*, everything is realized in its suchness, in its fullness, thus time is insignificant. However, in the light of compassion, also realized in *sūnyatā*, time is religiously significant and

essential. These two aspects of wisdom and compassion are inseparable. In Buddhism, compassion always goes with wisdom. “Compassion without wisdom is not understood to be true compassion and wisdom without compassion is not true wisdom” (Masao Abe, 1995, p. 15).

According to Zen Buddhism, Buddha means “an Enlightened One” or “an Awakened One”. Buddha is nothing but one who becomes enlightened or awakened to *Dharma*, that is the Truth. Zen is the practice of manifesting the Buddha’s mind, in that state of awareness as “what is at that moment”. However, anyone can become a Buddha, just as the *Sākyamuni* did, if one follows the same path. In Zen true Buddha means true Self. To reach Reality all kinds of objectification must be overcome. By realizing the unobjectifiable as one’s true “Self,” one turns from ego-centeredness to true Self as Reality. In the Zen experience of *satori*, things manifest themselves through one’s realization of true Emptiness (Ibid, p. 164).

The Doctrine of *Anattā* or No-self in Theravada Buddhism is the natural result of or the corollary to, the analysis of the five aggregates and the teaching of ‘dependent co-origination’ (*paticca-samuppāda*). *Anattā*, No-self, (No-soul) should not be considered as negative or annihilistic. Like *Nirvāna*, it is Truth, Reality, and a Reality cannot be negative. The teaching on *Anattā* dispels the darkness of false beliefs, and produces the light of wisdom (Rahula, 1974, p. 66).

According to Buddhism, for men and women to be perfect two qualities should be developed equally: compassion (*karunā*) on one side, and wisdom (*paññā*) on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom stands for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional

neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellect with no feeling for others. Therefore, to be perfect one has to develop both equally. That is the aim of the Buddhist way of life: in it wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked together (Ibid, p. 46).

2.4 The Meaning of Self-emptying in Islam

In Islam life is lived under a divine imperative, obligated to an absolute transcendence, religiously disciplined to a divinely given charter for mankind. Worship, therefore, must be defined as the due recognition of God, by the observances of the faith, the cult, and the practice which Islam affirms and provides. According to Muhammad's mission, the context was a pluralism of worships, a pantheon of tribal deities and nature gods. All pseudoplural deities were nonentities and had to be repudiated as such, so that Muslims would "have no other gods but God" (Encyclopedia of Religion, Muslim Worship, Vol.15, p.455).

Self-emptying is found in the five Pillars of Islam. *Shahadah*, or Witness: The first Pillar is the foundation of all that follows. To make the creedal confession, also called the *kalimah*, or "word of belief," is properly an act of worship. The Muslim *Shahadah* is terse in the extreme: "*La ilaha illa Allah; Muhammad rasul Allah*" (*Allah* is the only God; Mohammed is Allah's prophet). To that assertion it joins the mission itself, the indispensable counterpart of the truth that God is one. The faith is not a bare formula: it is a personal confession (Ibid, p.455). The Muslim empty and surrender themselves in total submission by accepting *Allah* as God. He is nothing and God is everything.

Salat, or the Prayer Rite: The second Pillar. Five times daily, the Muslim renews his response to God. *Salat* means bending, or inclining toward, so that the physical prostration of the body during the rite expresses the direction of the soul toward God. The whole is then a kind of personal sacrament of submission, in that the brow, seat of the intelligence and sign of the dignity of man, is brought low to the earth. Habituation and solidarity reinforce the sharply personal nature of *Salat*. *Salat* itself is a preservative from evil and must be prefaced by careful purification. This serves also to obviate inattentiveness and formalism by requiring effort and deliberation in a studied prelude to the ritual. The use of a prayer mat ensures the cleanliness of the immediate site, while some Muslims also use a small clay tablet on which to bring one's brow in prostration (Ibid, p.456). The Muslim prayer involves emptying oneself in total humility in seeking the Almighty.

Zakat and *Sawm*, Almsgiving and Fasting: The Third and Fourth Pillars. They concern the worship's liability to society and liability with the self. *Zakat* or the duty of alms payment is almost invariably linked in the *Qur'an* with *Salat*: "Perform the prayer and bring the alms"(cf. 2:43,2:83,4:77) (Ibid, p.457).

Sawm or fasting is likewise an aspect of worship in that it is a fulfillment of the divine directive. The faithful Muslim must abstain from all intake of food, drink, smoke, injections or the smelling of flowers through all the daylight hours of the twenty-eight days of Ramadan, the month of fast. The discipline of abstinence is known as *imsak*, meaning "holding back," restraining the will to indulge to seek relief. This *imsak* teaches the body to know its subordination, to realize its servant status, to recognize its true role as a Muslim's habitat. Almsgiving and fasting are not possible without the renunciation of the self. In almsgiving, the Muslim empties himself in order to reach out to the needy

and the poor. In fasting he empties himself in order to be filled by God who is infinitely greater than food and drink.

Pilgrimage: The fifth Pillar. Where all *salat* converges by means of the *qiblah*, all pilgrimage assembles—statutory pilgrimage, that is as distinct from devotional access to other shrines, especially within *Shi'i* Islam. Canonical pilgrimage, known as the *hajj*, is obligatory for all able-bodied Muslims to perform, at least once in their lifetime, during the month of pilgrimage, called *Dhu al-Hijja* (p.458). By performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Muslim renounces his self and goes forward to seek the profound experience of union with God in the company of his fellow believers gathered in Mecca. The single white dress of the Muslim pilgrim stands for his renunciation of everything in order to be filled by God.

Sufism: The mainspring of *Sufism* lay in the desire to cultivate the inner life and to attain a deeper, personal understanding of Islam. The essence of *Sufi* doctrine is moral contrition and detachment of the mind from the “good things” of the world (*zuhd*). The goal of love of God led to the doctrine of *fana* or “annihilation” that is, of the human self in God. This ideal was soon amended into “survival” after annihilation or regaining of a new self, and this formula was given different interpretations. Most *Sufis* taught that, after destruction of the human attributes (not the self), mortals acquire divine attributes (not the divine self) and “live in” them (Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol.7. p.314).

2.5 *Kenosis* in the Scriptures

2.5.1 Pauline Understanding of Self-emptying

The Christian understanding of *kenosis* has its origin in the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. Paul writes that the incarnation is the greatest event in human

history, God taking the form of man. This self-emptying of God in Christ is powerfully described by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11 as follows:

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In this passage, Paul's concern is with the life that Christians are to live. In Christ, God emptied himself by becoming a servant. Paul uses the term *kenosis* "emptying" to mean changing, or transforming the way of life a person has been leading up to now. In this sense, the word 'emptying' cannot be literally translated as 'nothingness' but as lowering of the status, to that of a servant, as Jesus did.

Paul explains, Jesus the incarnate God, emptying himself by pouring out his life for the world by dying on the cross, and he (Paul) requests the Philippian Christians that they should empty their carnal self and put on the person of Christ and lead a self-sacrificing life. He exhorts them to have the mind of Christ, through self-giving and self-forgetfulness. The real human problem is self-centeredness, selfishness, self-justification and self-glorification. Paul tells them to surrender their will to that of God for the good of the whole Christian community. He is teaching them to follow Jesus by divesting themselves of self, to become truly human, by reaching out to others and inviting them to be ready to give up their lives for the sake of the Kingdom.

2.5.2 Johannine Understanding of Self-emptying

St. John begins his Gospel with the words “In the beginning was the Word...All things were made through Him...And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1: 14) St. John gives us the clue in understanding the centrality of the second person of the Holy Trinity—the Logos, Word of God—in His creation. Wisdom created the universe eternally in the Word and thus Jesus the Word made flesh, is the center and crown of creation. The Old Testament viewed creation in terms of man, but in Johannine view, creation is understood in terms of the Word of God made flesh. St. John writes “All things were made through him and without him nothing was made that was made, in him was life and life was the light of men” (Jn. 1:3-4).

The Trinitarian God is itself a *kenosis*, a *kenosis* of love that allows the triune nature. “The begetting of the Son and the Spirit is a *kenosis*, a process of self-giving to the other” (Richard, 1982, p. 268). Thus *kenosis* of love is understood to be mutual in establishing the unity of the Trinity. This particular *kenotic* love establishing unity can be seen in Jesus, the *kenotic* self-communication of God; though fully man, yet fully God. Therefore in the Gospel of John, Jesus declares that His words and deeds are not his own but that of his Father. “My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me” (Jn 7:16). “I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me” (Jn 8: 28) “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (Jn 14:10-11). “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me” (Jn 14: 24).

In Christ, God communicates Himself. Thus He is God. God reveals in Him. He is the Word of God. His Words are God’s Words. Therefore St. John writes: “For God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten Son to the world”. The creation is the

kenosis of God in time. Everything that is created, all things that come to life are “enlivened” by this divine *kenotic* love. This *kenosis* of love is how God loved the world. And the depth of this love is revealed in the person of Christ. The *kenotic* love of God is “a pure *agape*” of self-giving God.

Thus for St. John, Jesus is the self-communication of God to the world—the *kenosis*—thereby God’s very nature is communicated to us in this *kenosis*. St. John writes:

“ But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:12-14).

2.5.3 Synoptic Understanding of Self-emptying

Synoptic¹² writers particularly Luke defines *kenosis* in the light of Incarnation through which God enters human reality and goes to the very depth of human existence (Lk.2: 1- 20). For Mark, Jesus is God’s *kenotic* love for humanity: “The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10: 42-45). The *kenosis* of Christ is expressed in the love and service for the poor, the sick, the strangers, the others, “the little ones” (Mt 25:31-46) as he calls them.

The ultimate *kenosis* of Christ is the *kenosis* of the Cross, where he experienced fear (Mk.14: 33), solitude and abandonment (Mk.15: 34). Jesus lived this self-emptying through his total obedience to the Will of the Father, a *kenosis* of total surrender in naked poverty as the sign of His love without limits (Lk. 23: 46).

¹² The word “Synoptic” means “with the same eye” or “seeing together.” Matthew, Mark and Luke present the basic story of Jesus in similar way, including the order of the material, the stories told, the sayings of Jesus. For this reason they are called the synoptic Gospels.

This *kenosis*, or emptying out the self is accomplished under the power of the Spirit. Those who accept Jesus as a model of self-giving will have the possibility of loving as He did.

2.6 Theology of the Divine *Kenosis*

“*Kenosis*” in the Christian sense is that the Word of God becomes human and is made known to humanity as Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus in his person emptied himself on the Cross for mankind—this notion of *kenosis* as self-sacrificial love, emerged within the Christian tradition. Mitchell (1991) asserts that, in Christianity, God created the world out of love which entails the self-negation of the Absolute—that God is love. This provides a connection between the *kenosis* of creation and the *kenosis* of God’s love. God, seen in this way, contains within himself a *kenotic* self-negation which is the absolute love that establishes our being in freedom and embraces us in love. This *kenotic* God of love is found in the whole creation, as the dynamic, creative power of life. And this creative dynamic of *kenosis* of God embraces all in love. Thus the presence of this *kenotic* God of love is found in the whole creation and exist therein as the Absolute’s affirmation of the self-negation of God. This is the true meaning of creation. Mitchell stresses that the Word of God is found within the world as a *kenotic* reality –the self-emptying love of God. God sees all in the Word and creates all out of this Word through the *kenosis* of love. (pp.13-15).

The Christian notion of *agape* is the non-differentiating love that allows one to love even one’s enemies; it is a matter of making oneself empty. God’s love is shown in Christ making himself empty to embrace all persons, the evil as well as the good, in forgiveness. This self-emptying activity is the perfect love or *agape* and is the very

nature of God. God is love. St. Thomas Aquinas says that God as Being creates beings like fire burning. In other words, God is actually “in” all things by his “essence, power, and presence” (2003, p. 90). Mitchell continues that God is not seen as a self-enclosed transcendent reality out there but, through a dynamic *kenosis* of love, God brings the whole creation to be a reflection of his glory. Indeed, the activity and Being of God are not to be separated. The activity of Being is love, creative love, and in essence “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8). Thus, God’s creative *kenosis* is the Trinitarian *kenosis* of the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. The nature of this fundamental *kenosis* is seen, in the Being of God as the presence and activity of the creative love. All beings are the effects of this love. We find God’s presence and love in all things, for we see God not as a static Godhead, but a dynamic *kenotic* Godhead of self-emptying love (Ibid, pp. 18-28).

Further, the *kenosis* of the Father is the emptying of his creative love in the Son, his divine creative Word in whom the Father sees his love in the whole creation. The Son does not hold that love for himself, but being completely transparent, empties it through the Holy Spirit into creation, and finally into redemptive love of the Cross. Thus the fullness of all creation, nature and humanity, is linked or unified by the golden thread of love. In Christian spirituality, *kenosis* is not to be contemplated only, but lived. We are to live the Trinity, to live its love and unity—through self-emptying in the service of others.

The *kenosis* of the Incarnation and the Cross is an act of Christ that reveals his original nature, because the Son of God is originally the self-emptying of the Father. It is clear that the redemptive *kenosis* of God is at work in humankind just as the creative *kenosis* of God is at the ground of human existence. This love of God for the world that is revealed in the *kenosis* of the Cross, is also found in the *kenosis* of love at the core of creation that is in turn an expression of the eternal Love that is God himself. This life of

kenosis is at work in the activity of God as the Creator. The *kenosis* of Christ not only reveals the innermost nature of the triune God, but also reveals how a Christian must live.

Mitchell concludes that the *kenosis* of the Father results in creation, God effects beings. The *kenosis* of the Son results in redemption, God effects new beings. The effect in both cases comes not from the human will, but has its ground in God. Within the Trinity, the Son exists through the communication of the divine *kenosis* by and from the Father. This communication is love. The Son is completely transparent so that this *kenotic* communication is mutual; he communicates back to the Father the love which he has received. In this way the Father empties his love to generate the Son and in this *kenosis* he is fully the Father. And the Son communicates this love back to the Father keeping nothing for himself, and in this *kenosis* he is fully the Son. Thus Father and Son exist in a relationship of a selfless mutual indwelling of love. The Holy Spirit is the very love that unites the Father and the Son. Since the Father and the Son mutually indwell in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit indwells in the Father and the Son. In his *kenosis*, the Holy Spirit keeps nothing for himself but is fully love of the Father and the Son. This relation determines his dynamic identity as well. The Holy Spirit, as the self-determination of God's own holy love, the God-love, is present and active in Jesus Christ since Jesus is the Son of God. The Spirit's indwelling in the Son means that he indwells in Jesus who is the incarnation of the Son. In the *kenosis* of Jesus on the Cross, Jesus emptied himself and poured forth the life of the Holy Spirit on all who accept him in faith. This pouring forth of new life, this transmission of transforming power by the Holy Spirit, is achieved through the *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit (Ibid, pp.92-93).

2.7 The Church and *Kenosis*

Chiara Lubich¹³ (1985) says that “Jesus forsaken” is the model for Christians

how to live the *kenotic* love. She points out that as the suffering servant, “Jesus forsaken” shows that one must be willing to lose everything, to be detached from everything, for the sake of caring for one’s neighbor. Speaking of this, Paul writes about non-clinging, though God: “Yet he (Jesus) did not cling to his equality with God” (Phil 2:6). So Jesus did not cling to anything, even his Godhead, in order to make himself one with those in need. Thus in his *kenotic* love for humanity, he was not even attached to the Father, as such Jesus is a model for the emptiness needed to be one with others. And also in the cry of the abandoned one, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27: 46), one hears the feeling of Jesus emptied of his very relationship to his Father. Lubich also points out that “Jesus forsaken” embraced all humanity in his kenosis. The *kenotic* love enwrapped all humanity in its universality. In this, he reveals the universal love of God that includes everyone in its scope, even the most evil of sinners: “For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and he sends rain on the just and on unjust” (Mt. 5:45). In this way, “Jesus forsaken” shows that the great universal compassion of God that serves all humanity, “not to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10:45). “Jesus forsaken” was the first to love in his relation to humanity. So, we should be the first to love, to be the first to put love into practice with everyone whom we meet in our day-to-day life (Mitchell, 1991, pp. 68-69).

¹³ Chiara Lubich is the founder and current president of the Focolare Movement. She is well known both in and outside of the Church circles for her original and notable contribution of life and teaching, and who has been recognized on many occasions by Popes Paul VI and John Paul

Lubich continues that when a Christian empties himself in order to take in the joys and sorrows of others then he is enabled to live with his neighbor. The grace of the Holy Spirit empowers the Christians to live the *kenosis* of self, as Paul was asking the Philippian Christians. The Spirit of Christ, present in each member of the community, unites them in mutual love, for Christ is “the light that enlightens all persons” (Jn 1.9). The Christian beholds God in all and through all and this hidden unity links all in his love. The Christian, finds that all are brothers and sisters in the shared *kenosis* of the Father. The *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit pours itself through the community that effects ultimate transformation of all humanity and creation, building the Kingdom of love.

The Holy Spirit, active in Christ, binds the “people of God,” the Church into Christ’s mystical body. The Church sees itself as the continuation of the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit in the world. Thus, the Church is the gift of the Holy Spirit to which Christians are “called out” and “have a share” in building a universal community of God. The Holy Spirit enables members of the Church to participate and “have a share” in the death and the resurrection of Jesus, whereby they become a community, that participates in Christ’s *kenosis* of love. Through the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the incarnation of Christ among humanity, the Christian Community is called out together to share the lived reality of God’s communication through the *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit with all peoples. In this way, as the body of Christ, the Church is the leaven that transforms the larger human community into God’s Kingdom (Ibid, pp.102-105). So the Christian Church proclaims that Jesus Christ is the center of the universe, for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him (Col 1: 15-18).

In summary, *Kenosis* (self-emptying) is an idea that has its foundation in Christology. Philippians 2: 5-11 provides a basis for understanding Jesus Christ as God self-emptying or self-limiting love, taking the form of a man. God's life is a *kenosis* of love, where the Father emptying himself is the Son and the self-emptying is the Spirit. Creation is a manifestation of the *kenotic* love of God. This *kenotic* God is the ground of the *kenotic* Christ. The Divine self-emptying is *agape*, the nature of God. Thus the Christian *kenosis* is the unconditional love of God for creation manifested in the Incarnation.



CHAPTER III

MARY'S LIFE: A *KENOTIC* HORIZON

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I would focus on the personality of Mary characterized by her total *kenosis* or self-emptying. After reflecting on her personality, I would highlight the *kenotic* dimension of Mary's life, analyzing three of the various episodes in her life, namely: the "Annunciation" that brings out Mary as a "woman of faith", the "Visitation" Mary as a "woman of love" and "Beneath the Cross" Mary as a "woman of hope".

3.1.1 The Personality of Mary

Mary was a Jewish woman. She was born at Nazareth, as the daughter of Joachim and Anne. They came from a rural setting in Galilee and lived probably in a small family house of stones and mud-bricks as the local people did. From Joachim and Anne, Mary learned the foundational attitudes and values required for life. The childhood of Mary was that of a typical Jewish girl of her time. Her character was formed by her devout parents, particularly to be docile to God and to await the coming of the promised one. She learned the Scriptures as the other girls in Galilee and listened to the prophetic call to be holy. She learned to discern and obey Yahweh's will even in the smallest events of life (Scaperlanda, 2002, pp. 64-66).

Mary was deeply rooted in her Jewish religious history. She grew up in the Jewish tradition of heroic women of faith and courage like Ruth, Naomi and Esther. These women

of great faith totally dedicated their lives to Yahweh that changed the course of history of the Israelites. They fought against faithlessness, hopelessness and narrow-mindedness. They questioned, searched, changed and led their race to a new understanding of relationship with Yahweh and one another.

Mary was a devout person who lived in continual communion with Yahweh in the silence of her heart. Yahweh was her everything. She emptied herself in a world where self was everything. In the silence of her heart, she underwent self-emancipation. The old self was cast away and she put on the true self willed by Yahweh himself. She emptied herself of all self-centeredness. It is in prayer that Mary found the courage to open herself to God and allowed the Word to become flesh within her heart proclaiming, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Mary's wordless listening prayer guided her in discerning God's will for her life. As Mary pondered on God's workings and sought to give herself exclusively to him, her prayer became a silent attentiveness. One particular episode in the Scriptures manifests Mary's contemplative prayer posture that took place in the stark poverty of the cave in Bethlehem (Lk.2: 1- 20). Mary took this unusual happening to pray, quietly reflecting on all that was taking place: "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk.2: 19). This episode points to her contemplative personality. Humanly speaking, she did not understand, but she contemplated in her heart the mysterious working of God and was moved to give herself with greater trust and love to His divine will (Rosage, 2000, p. 91). Mary was alive to the power of Yahweh in the ordinary happenings of life. She was a faithful Jewish woman who reached into Divine mystery. She was the Ark of the Covenant, where Yahweh

dwelled. Ridick (1984) points out that “Mary is the model of those who make their lives as offerings to God. She remained always perfectly transparent to God’s word; hers was a perfect acceptance of Him. She was always an ardent and faithful servant of Yahweh (p. 130).

Mary emptied herself of self-centeredness that is at the basis of humankind’s ordinary way of being by the power of Yahweh. In this emptiness of self, she lived the life of Yahweh within her, she lived an immaculate life ever responding to the inspiration of Yahweh. In the silence of her heart she heard the voice of God. When she was asked to be the *porta coeli*, the gate of heaven, she said her “*fiat*” that brought the Messiah, promised in the Genesis, who will crush the head of the evil one. The Lord God said to the serpent:

“Because you have done this, you shall be banned from all the animals and from all the wild creatures; on your belly shall you crawl, and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel” (Gen 3: 14-15).

Her emptying of the evil of self-centeredness created the possibility for her to live a life of God-centeredness. Her self-emptied womb became the dwelling place of God’s Son, and of the whole of redeemed humanity. Speaking of the personality of Mary, the Second Vatican Council states that she “freely cooperated in the work of man’s salvation through her faith and obedience.” It continues:

Thus the daughter of Adam, Mary, consenting to the word of God, became the Mother of Jesus. Committing herself whole-heartedly and impeded by no sin to God’s saving will, she devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of Redemption, by the grace of Almighty God (LG. 56).

The Catholic Church presents Mary as the example of a true Christian. She was the faithful woman. Mary, who was free, active, courageous and intelligent, was very feminine with the capacity of gracefully retiring to the background at the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee.¹⁴ Yet her maternal presence can be felt in every page of the Gospels—Bethlehem, Nazareth, Cana of Galilee, Calvary and in the Upper Room. Mary played various roles: daughter, wife, mother, but always in communion with God. In her dignity and faithfulness, in her pure and tireless devotion to Yahweh, Mary embodies the heart of a true disciple.

3.1.2 Mary's *Kenotic* Song of Life

Mary lived a balanced life of activity and contemplation. She was no doubt, a practical, efficient, and devout woman within her cultural setting. But it was Mary's closeness to Yahweh that gave meaning to her life and work. "For He who is mighty has done great things in me and Holy is His name (Lk 1:49). Truly, in the *kenotic* spirit, Mary sang the *Magnificat* where she celebrated the marvels God worked in her. The *Magnificat* is Mary's song of life where she praises Yahweh's goodness:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

¹⁴ Cana is a small hill town in Galilee, not too far from Nazareth, where at a marriage feast Jesus transformed ordinary water into wine of exceptional quality at the request of His mother Mary (Jn 2: 1-11).

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel,
For he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever (Lk 1:46-55).

In this Song, her joy flowed from the personal experience of God's looking with kindness upon her. God is not only almighty to whom nothing is impossible, as angel Gabriel had declared (Lk 1:37), but also the merciful, who is capable of tenderness and fidelity toward every human being. Thus Mary did not limit her vision to her own personal case, but realized how these gifts show forth God's mercy toward all His people. In her, God fulfilled His promises with a superabundance of fidelity and generosity.

Mary carried out her role as "Mother of the Church" as she is described in the *Acts of the Apostles*. At the beginning of the history of the early Church Luke described the life of the first Christian community in these words "All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14). The person of Mary stands out clearly in the early Christian community along with the apostles, as she is the only one mentioned by name. Mary lived

with the Church as its “mother.” She made Jesus present in the Church because she gave Him life, but also because she accepted Him in herself and now she accomplishes this in his disciples. Mary’s heart was open to the Church to show the marvels done in her by the almighty and merciful God.

3.2 The Annunciation: Mary a Woman of Faith

Mary dedicated her life to God, and lived a simple life at Nazareth. She was a woman of faith who surrendered to God, ready to fulfill his will for his plan of salvation. The whole of Mary’s greatness lies in the fact that in the Incarnation of God, she is the one indispensable collaborator with God. Mary is thus humanity itself consenting to life, grace and salvation. Mary not only gave her flesh to the eternal Son, but also received him in herself through an act of obedience and faith. The Gospel of Luke, describing the familiar account of the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she was to have a child through the Holy Spirit, says:

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. Upon arriving, the angel said to her: “Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women”. She was deeply troubled by his words, and wondered what his greeting meant. The angel went on to say to her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man? And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And

behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her (Lk 1: 26-38).

We saw earlier that Mary dedicated her entire life to God, single-heartedly. When the call came from God for her to be the Mother of the Messiah, she was confused and afraid; she did not know what the future was going to be like. Yet she said "Yes", her "*Fiat*" to God. For her it was God that mattered, not herself. She accepted God wholeheartedly into herself. It is the total emptying of herself in order to be filled with God.

3.2. 1 Abrahamic Faith of Mary

The Old Testament tells us that Abraham believed Yahweh unconditionally. Abraham was the friend of Yahweh when God directed him to leave his homeland and kinsfolk to the land Yahweh will give him as his inheritance, Abraham gladly did it without questioning. He trusted God absolutely. Again when he was told that he would be father of a great nation, he accepted Yahweh's word, even though he had no children and Abraham and Sarah were old. Neither did he understand Yahweh when he commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. Abraham's faith was so great that he was ever ready to obey God. He readily gave up the ethical for the religious, the finite for the infinite. Gabriel Marcel (1973) quoting Kierkegaard says that having entered into a life of faith, man gains his selfhood and begins to exist authentically. He leaps into the abyss of faith (p.40). In faith, man risks everything but he receives in return infinitely more than he has

been able to give; he has transcended the finite, thereby attaining communion with the infinite God.

Mary stands in the Abrahamic tradition, with complete faith and trust in Yahweh. Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant and Mary's faith the New Covenant. Mary at the Annunciation, believed Yahweh through the power of the Most High, the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son in accordance with the angel's revelation. She did not understand when God asked her consent, her free co-operation in the fulfillment of His plan. In an act of faith Mary responded to God's invitation whereby she abandoned herself freely to the will of God. As St. Augustine writes: "Through her faith, Mary conceived Christ in her spirit before she gave birth to him through her body" (Jacques Bur, 1994, p.9)

Hans Küng (1976) writes that Mary as the mother of Jesus is a human being and not a heavenly being. As a human being and as a mother, she witnessed Jesus' true humanity, and in faith accepted His Divinity. Mary is the example and model of Christian faith. Her unconditional faith stood by her whether going to Bethlehem from Nazareth, or fleeing to Egypt; when she lost her Son in the temple or when Jesus asked her permission to do His Father's will that led Him to the Cross. This unique path of Mary's faith provides a perfect pattern for the whole Christian community.

As the Vatican Council says, "The obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God" (cf. Rome.16: 26, 2 Cor 10:5-6). This description of faith found a perfect realization in Mary. Mary's unconditional response to the power of the Holy Spirit raised in her new levels of

awareness that God was her everything and she felt empty without God. As she obeyed God, she was filled by his continued gift of love and experienced great reverence for Yahweh's awesome presence. Mary knew she was guided in every event of her life by the powerful hand of a loving God.

3.2 2. 'A Sword shall Pierce your Heart'

It is certain that, at the time of Annunciation, Mary did not know all the aspects of the redeeming work. But it was enough that she realized that Jesus was the expected Messiah. Therefore Mary was able with the help of divine grace, to fall in with the redeeming plan, even though she did not understand how it was going to work out. Mary did not understand everything, but she accepted everything. In faith she committed herself, and submitted to the will of God. Simeon¹⁵ in the temple said that Jesus will be a sign of contradiction and that a sword will pierce Mary's heart. He prophesied taking the child in his hands, "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and a sign that will be opposed...and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk. 2: 34). What must have gone through Mary's mind as she heard the puzzling words of this devout old man? Whatever understanding Mary may have had of Jesus' coming mission, it was clearly incomplete at that time: "And His father and mother marveled at what was said about

¹⁵

Simeon was an upright and devout man who lived in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit was with him. He looked forward to the time when the Lord would comfort Israel. He had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah of the Lord. So he was led into the temple by the Holy Spirit at that time the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law (Lk. 2: 25-27).

Him” (Lk 2: 33). Only a Mother with great faith and hope could peacefully hold such statements in her heart, while trusting God to unfold their meaning in His own time.

Mary's consciousness of the historical events taking place in her affected her daily living. To realize and fulfill herself, Mary had to be aware of the divine dimension of the historical events that she experienced. Mary not only believed but was also conscious of what she believed. Consciousness became the bridge between the faith of Mary and her actions. Such a consciousness gave meaning to her actions and dynamically brought her being to perfection and fulfillment. Pope John Paul II, extols the faith of Mary as follows:

Mary had faith as if everything depended on God whose gift was evident in her Immaculate Conception, and she acted as if everything depended on her. Mary was aware of her faith and acting upon it, her conscious actions became the tool for bringing to perfection her being, which was already the recipient of God's generous gift of sinlessness (RM 8).

At the Annunciation, Mary entrusted herself entirely to God...manifesting the obedience of faith (RM. 13). She uttered her “yes” in faith, without knowing the future unfolding of her mission as mother. During the years of Jesus' hidden life in his home at Nazareth, the life of Mary was also ‘hidden with Christ in God’ (Col 3:3). However, Mary was in contact with the truth of her son only in faith and by faith. Thus the Annunciation explains that Mary entrusted herself to God completely with the responding love, obedience, self-giving, and the readiness for others.

3. 3 The Visitation: Mary a Woman of Love

Soon after the Annunciation by the angel, Mary went to the southern hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was with child. St Luke shows how, through the grace of Incarnation, Mary brings salvation and joy to Elizabeth's house. Mary carried in her womb, the Savior of men, revealing the power of the Holy Spirit.

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1: 41-45).

Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth was the beginning of Mary's active journey of faith, though she had begun this journey of faith within her heart long before. Mary, moved by compassion and love, immediately responded to her friend and relative in need. Mary and Elizabeth were cousins and friends. Mary, recognizing and affirming the blessing Yahweh had given to her cousin in her old age, praised and blessed the Lord for the great marvels in her life and also in her cousin's. (Lk 1: 39-47).

3. 3.1 *Kenosis* and Love

St. John writes: "God is love. Whoever keeps His word, the love of God is perfected in him...let us love one another for love is of God" (1Jn 4: 16-17). Through Mary's *fiat*, the God of love is born in her; with this love she goes to serve Elizabeth who is

much older than Mary and further along in her own pregnancy. Mary does not go to tell about what was happening to her, but just to help Elizabeth, out of compassion and loving-kindness. In *kenotic* self-forgetfulness, Mary lives the love of the new life within her and makes herself one with Elizabeth. Elizabeth returns that love which then becomes mutual.

The Gospel has this to say of their meeting:

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice: "Blessed are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me? The moment your greetings sounded in my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy. Blest is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled" (Lk 1: 41-45).

In her song of joy (*Magnificat*), Mary, like a clear mirror, reflects and magnifies God: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1:46). Upon her own nothingness she recognizes the greatness of God. She sang forth from her original and true way of being in the world, a way of selfless love that represents God-Love and is the way that all humankind was created to his image. From this point of view, Mary is not *a model* for a kind of distorted *kenosis* where one allows oneself to be dominated by others. To be empty of self means to be empowered by God in freedom and openness in one's choice to give compassionate care to others, and also to be humble enough to accept the compassionate care from others when necessary. Thus Mary is a model of a *kenotic* love that seeks to aid and liberate all who are in need. To say "Yes" to God-Love is to live that Love by being empty of self in order to go out of oneself to people in need, as Mary did (Mitchell, 1991, p. 197).

The New Testament narrates that Jesus lived and taught in order to attain the full, authentic human life and to share joyfully in God's eternal life for which self-centeredness had to be abandoned. He was "a man for others" and died for them because there is no greater love than that one lays down his life for his friends. He showed us how God emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant (Phil 2:6). The Good News is that God so loved the world as to give us his only Son, that we might believe in him as the saving Lord and thus share in God's eternal life (Jn 3:16). God's love is the ultimate meaningfulness beyond all human, rational explanations of what is truly real. But this is a love that is self-emptying, *kenotic* in its outpouring of oneself in love for others.

We know that the basis of Christian love is not a feeling but a commitment to serve, to put others before ourselves. Christian love, like God's love, is unconditional. The Christian's goal is not self-fulfillment, but the love of God and neighbor.¹⁶ The love of God cannot be separated from love of all people. We have to forget ourselves and see ourselves in other persons in order to give ourselves to them with full generosity (Max Thurian, 982). St. Paul names charity as the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the heart. "The fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trust, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). Thus all true love of the others must ultimately be based on the love of God. It is this love which gives value to man's actions. According to St. Paul,

"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-

¹⁶

Although the Christian goal of life is not self-actualization but self-emptying in order to be filled by God, paradoxically, self-emptying is also self-fulfillment as the Christian is filled with the riches of God.

tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13: 4-7).

He states that human love can preserve itself and grow in supernatural love because it has the characteristics of *Agape*, of Christ's love. In fact, true effective Christian personality integration can come about primarily through and in love of God and his people.

As we have already pointed out, Mary discovered the providential love of the heavenly Father. She experienced God's love in her life. Mary opened herself to the inner beauty of God's loving presence in each person to whom she related. She came alive and discovered God in each human encounter. Her faith made her joyfully alive and discover God in each person, as she found Him within herself. Thus she was able to find God's loving presence everywhere and in everything. Her trust allowed her to give herself to the human situation without fear or nervousness. God's Spirit of love allowed her to be delicately open and sensitive to the needs of others.

God's design of love for humanity has already been fulfilled in one of its members, the first to be fully divinized: Mary. Marisa Cerini (1992) quoting Chiara Lubich says that "Mary, Mother of beautiful Love had abundantly known...supernatural love. Born full of grace, she was overshadowed by Love in person—the Holy Spirit—when the Word became incarnate in her womb and was then covered by his flames at Pentecost" (p. 73). Her life is an explanation of God, an open book that explains God because God is love.

Chiara (1987) referring back to a period of light in which the mystery of Mary was being revealed to her inside the mystery of love, which is God, explains:

“It seems to us to have better understood how she loved the Father, how she was taught by the Son how to love the Father, and as a consequence, how much she was loved by the Father. We felt as though we saw fully accomplished in her Jesus’ prayer to the Father: “You loved them as you loved me” (Jn 17: 23), because the Father loved her as he loved the Son (Cerini, p. 73).

We saw her therefore as the daughter par excellence, “the beloved daughter of the Father” (LG 53). Chiara claimed that Mary is “the living, most pure and radiant image of God who is love, almost the incarnation of love or the arms of providence extended to humanity in order to save it, to dry tears, to close wounds, to point to the Eternal” (Ibid, p. 74).

3.3.2 The Wedding at Cana

In the Gospel of John, Mary is mentioned for the first time in the story of the wedding at Cana, a village near Nazareth:

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had likewise been invited to the celebration. At a certain point the wine ran out, and Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no wine.” Jesus replied, “Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother instructed those waiting on table. “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the head waiter.” So they took it. And when the head waiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from...Jesus performed this first of his signs at Cana in Galilee. Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him (Jn 2: 1-5, 11).

Noticing that the wine was running low, Mary revealed her undaunted faith in her Son's power and loving care and concern for everyone's needs. When she told Jesus that the wine was failing, his answer seemed to manifest some indifference: "My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). Yet Mary believed so firmly in her son's compassion and power that she said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2: 5). The presence of Mary at Cana is an invitation to rediscover the special role which, according to the eternal plan of divine love and the diverse demands of history, women play in marriage and in the family, in the Church and in society. At Cana, Mary is the model of caring. She discovers the uneasiness of the spouses and makes it her own, their pain becomes hers and says to her Son "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). These words are not simply an affirmation or observation it really means: "We have no more wine". This intense participation of Mary in human situations is still true today where Christians approach Mary in all their needs.

While Mary was on earth, her love was so great that she was on the alert to help the needy even without being asked. She observed the situation at the wedding and discovered a need. Mary did not live for herself; she was the "handmaid of the Lord." Her life was placed completely at God's service. She was completely willing and ready to serve. For she, at all times, strove not to fulfill merely the law in external observations but to be the servant of the Lord. She shows us that Christian freedom is an ongoing gift to us by the Holy Spirit. Freedom is to obey God, to take our whole life in hand and dispose it totally in loving service to God and his people. Freedom for her was to be the person God destined her to be. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:18). Mary responded in faith to the love of God by her complete

surrender to serve him in all. Her joy and holiness have to be measured and described in terms of love. Mary had the freedom to love. True love, self-sacrificing love on behalf of others, always brings forth true joy that no one can take away. She freely placed herself at the service of God's Word, the inner presence of God's love incarnated and living in her. She experienced always the paradox, that to be free is to become a slave to serve others in love. She knew that she was called to serve others in love; therefore, she emptied herself in order to be filled with God.

For you were called for freedom. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Gal 5: 13-14).

The purer a heart is, the emptier of the self it becomes, and the more it is filled with love for God. Because Mary was thoroughly humble and thoroughly unselfish, she was filled with divine love. Mary loved with her whole heart, with her whole soul, with her whole strength, and was full of grace. Among the "disciples" who "believed" in Jesus and accepted the manifestation of his glory there was Mary. She was the first to believe, and she believed with the most fervent faith. More than any other disciple she was introduced into the understanding of the sign and participated in the salvific love of her Son. His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). In Mary's life, however, we discover the secret of progress in holiness and the essential element in her motivation. Mary faithfully fulfilled God's will for her because of her intense love. Even in the supreme hour of the Cross, she would be near Jesus, both as one redeemed and as co-redemptrix.

3. 4 Beneath the Cross: Mary a Woman of Hope

We shall consider the third event that sheds further light on the personality of Mary. Mary standing “Beneath the Cross” where Jesus her Son, and the Son of God, is dying as a criminal on the Cross reveals that she was a woman of hope. We read in the Gospel of St. John 19: 25-27:

Near the Cross of Jesus there stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then He said to his disciple, Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Painters have graphically depicted Mary standing beneath the Cross. She was told at the Annunciation: “You shall bear a Son and he shall be called the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1: 31-32). Now He is dying. Mary understood now the prophetic reference made by Simeon to the passion of her Son and the sword that pierced her heart. At the time when Simeon prophesied she did not understand its full implication:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted so that a sword will pierce through your own soul” (Lk 2: 29-35).

For a mother, the child is the greatest possession and now Mary lost that greatest of possession. The *Pieta* of Michaelangelo expresses the pain she experienced when the lifeless body of her Son was placed in her lap after being taken down from the Cross. In

spite of all this, Mary trusted in Yahweh's promise. She believed Yahweh would brighten everything; her faith and love turned to hope.

Maloney (1994) writes that Mary learned to trust in Yahweh who filled her with peace and joy. Her contentment was built upon her "faith-vision" that God is working in all events of her life. The trust in God enabled her to welcome everything as coming from him. She was totally open to him. Mary's hope made her wait for God's richness to be poured into her emptiness whenever and wherever he wished. God is all and Mary knew that she alone was nothing. She was content and filled with joy in all things, because in her littleness, in her truthful stance before the greatness of God, she continually experienced that "whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt 23:12). Hope is born of faith and love. Mary had the virtue of faith, hope and love in the highest degree. Mary trusted God because she did not trust in her own merits but relied entirely on God. Mary, therefore, submitted herself to the care of God with the fullest confidence that he would guard her innocence and reputation. Mary's faith at the Annunciation was turned into hope beneath the Cross. She is the mother of hope. Her "yes" at the Annunciation was the key for her whole life up to "beneath the Cross" and beyond. Mary's "yes" was the concrete expression of the unqualified response that she made through love; a response that was so deep and total that it was eternally faithful. It was never to be withdrawn, even when it led her to Calvary. She knew that obedience must be an effective readiness to let herself be conformed to Jesus Christ even in His Passion.

Hope kept Mary standing at the Cross to witness the outpouring of Jesus' redemptive love. Mary placed her hope in God, who "so loved the world that he gave his

only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Indeed, so strong is Mary's example of hope that the Second Vatican Council calls Mary “the sign of created hope and solace to the wandering people of God”. The Council document, *Lumen Gentium*, even declares Mary to be the image of the Church, since both are the source of their hope:

In the interim, the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come, so too does she shine forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth (LG. 68).

Mary, remained always perfectly transparent to God's word; hers was a perfect acceptance of Him, an ardent, ever faithful living will to be with Him, like Him, and for Him. Her love, like the immensity of her desires, was completely fulfilled. As the Mother of God, Mary participated in spirit in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, “lovingly consenting,” as Pope Paul VI had said, “to his sacrifice and offering her own sorrow to the Father. Throughout her motherhood and her life, Mary gave of herself in a way that she would never have imagined possible and treasured these things faithfully in her heart” (Ridick, 1984).

3.4.1 *Kenosis* and Hope

Mary's sufferings were great because they were caused by her love for her divine Son. Mary's love for Jesus was threefold: natural love, acquired love, and supernatural love. In the first place, Mary's love for Jesus was a natural love because she was His

Mother and He her Son. Her motherhood is unique in that she conceived and bore her Son without the intervention of any human agency. Thus, Mary's natural love for her Son was not surpassed by any parents. So with deep sorrow and pain she stood beneath the Cross at Calvary during His dying moments. No mind can conceive nor tongue express the greatness of Mary's sorrow as she stood at the Cross of her dying Son.

The scene "Beneath the Cross" explained the union of the Mother and the Son in the work of Redemption. Mary shared the bitter sorrow of her only Son, associated herself to His sacrifice with the heart of a mother, and lovingly consented to the immolation of the victim which has been born of her (LG 58). Mary freely involved herself in the sacrifice of Christ, the Redeemer, by her faith, just as at Annunciation she freely involved herself in the Incarnation by accepting her motherhood. By committing herself to the mystery of the crucifixion, Mary implicitly committed herself to the mystery of the Resurrection. Her acceptance of the darkness of the Cross was a commitment to the light of Easter which allowed her to recognize clearly the significance of the death of her Son.

The Vatican Council text also stresses that Mary's consent to Jesus' immolation is not a passive acceptance but a genuine act of love, by which she offered her Son as a "victim" of expiation for the sins of all humanity. Pope John Paul II claimed that Mary's hope at the foot of the Cross contains a light brighter than the darkness that reigns in many hearts: in the presence of the redeeming Sacrifice, the hope of the Church and of humanity is born in Mary.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, hope as the second theological virtue is a disposition that embraces its object as a future good, namely, eternal life or enjoyment of

God. It also embraces intermediate goals and can look for oneself and for others. Both rely on God and are directed to God as their final end, preparing the way for love that is directed to God altruistically (Downey, 1993, p. 510).

St. Paul says that hope is the work of the Spirit (Gal 5:5), that hope permeates all creation as it struggles toward salvation (Rom 8:18-25), hope is expressed in fortitude in the face of risk and suffering (1Tim. 1:1-3), that it is exercised by covenantal living. Paul maintains that Abraham put his faith in God's promises and he took drastic steps to live according to those promises (Rom 4:18-19). Paul continues that love hopes everything. In reality, the hope that hopes everything creates conditions conducive to a change in circumstances. Since a Christian's invisible hope has complete confidence in God, it also has confidence in every person and all events.

Gabriel Marcel (1973) says that hope gives meaningfulness to man's existence. Without hope, there can be no life whatsoever. Hoping is a process, a psychic activity of persons. It is not just an idea, but real and concrete in the everyday life. He claimed that hoping is basically a shared experience. Jürgen Moltmann (1975) stated that Christian theology speaks of God historically, that is, it proclaims the God of Abraham as the God of the promise of blessing for all people. Abraham was called the "Father of faith" (Rom. 4:11 and Heb. 11: 8-19). Abraham's faith led him to hope. Hope in the promise of Yahweh that he would become the father of a great nation, became a reality in the course of history. Yahweh is a faithful God. In Joshua 24: 2-3, we read the following:

"Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates...and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan..."

Genesis 12: 1-5 tells how the Lord, whom Abraham did not know at the beginning, asked him:

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. He took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.

So Abraham experienced this reality of God in which he heard his promise and followed it. How and why, it is not said. Moltmann claims that Abraham trusted in the word of the promise more than in all the securities of his life “beyond the River.” He left the familiar patterns of his life, which had provided a home and security for him. He abandoned his fatherland and became an alien. He left his friends and was alone. He left his father’s house and lost his identity. He left even his gods, the Aramaic nature gods who guaranteed order, fertility, and peace in the “eternal return of the same,” and became a godly person who alone followed the call of the unknown “Lord”. The Bible calls this faith: leaving the dwelling place of reality where one has peace and security and giving oneself over to the course of history, to the way of freedom and danger, the way of disappointment and surprise led solely by the God of hope (pp. 47-48).

Pope John Paul II points out that Mary as “a woman of hope who, like Abraham, accepted God’s will “hoping against hope” (Rom 4:18); she is “a radiant model for those who entrust themselves with all their hearts to the promises of God” (Rosage, 2000, p. 110). The Vatican Council says: “Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation and

in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith". Among all believers she is like a "mirror" in which are reflected in the most profound and limpid way "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). Mary is the mother of hope. *The Acts of the Apostles* lists her among the apostles gathered in the community in Jerusalem between the time of the Ascension of Jesus and Pentecost.

After the Ascension they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olives near Jerusalem—a mere sabbath's journey away. Entering the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying...together they devoted themselves to constant prayer. There were some women in their company, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (Acts 1: 12-14).

Mary was and is the one who is "blessed because she believed," she was the first to believe. Whatever happened Mary hoped that all of God's promises would be fulfilled. The other women who were with Mary beneath the cross lost hope in seeing Jesus dying—as all was ended, but Mary hoped that He will rise again on the third day as promised. Her hope was realized on the first Easter Sunday—"The Lord is risen." Mary was the mother of hope and gave hope to the disciples.

The hope in resurrection within Christianity is therefore no longer a wishful thinking but a reality. A Christian travels along with Abraham and Mary to the promised land of heaven at the end of his earthly life. In the midst of sufferings, loss of meaning, of failures, a Christian lives in the hope that the promises of God will be fulfilled. With this in mind the Christian moves on. Thus a Christian is a person of hope. It is indeed a hope, a light in the midst of hopelessness. Through the crucified and risen Christ the hope of resurrection and life, freedom, joy and justice are opened up to those who live in the

various vicissitudes of life. The crucified Christ is the sign of God's hope on earth for all those who live here in the shadow of the Cross. Hope born out of the Cross of Christ distinguishes faith from superstition as well as from disbelief.

Redemptoris Mater, the Papal Encyclical of John Paul II explains that only faith empowered by the grace of God enabled Mary to lead a life of faith. Through that assent, she performed the most perfect act of faith, called "*kenosis* of faith"

Through faith, Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying...At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the sharing mystery of the self-emptying. This is the deepest *kenosis* of faith in human history (RM. 18).

The faith of Mary, instead of being one of her abstract qualifications, became a concrete act of hope that led her through the historical stages of her life with her Son up to beneath the Cross. Mary's hope came from faith in God. "Beneath the Cross," we find the most painful event in Mary's *kenosis*—*kenotic* transformation. She is the model of hope and courage in life's crucifixions. Her contentment was built upon her "faith-vision" of God working through every event of her life. This developed in her a profound trusting hope. Mary's hope made her life filled with contentment and joy at all times, in her littleness and in her truthful stances before the greatness of God. Her hope was crowned in her assumption to the heart of God.

In summary, Mary is the model of attentiveness to God. She emptied herself and was open to God. God singled her out from humanity to be the mother of the promised messiah. She said "yes," her "*fiat*" to God. Mary's "*fiat*" did not end with the Annunciation; it took her through the diverse events of life to beneath the Cross.

CHAPTER IV

THE *KENOTIC* LIFE OF MARY AND THE LIFE OF COMMITMENT OF LCU SISTERS

4.1 Introduction

This section is on Mary's *kenotic* life and its ramifications on committed life known as "Religious life," a lifestyle approved by the Church. The Congregation of LCU Sisters are devout women who have embraced the "Religious life" and are committed to God through the three evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity, and poverty, living in a community.

Mary, as we have explained in the previous chapter, lived a life of total commitment to Yahweh following the Old Testament tradition. She lived by the covenant Yahweh made to his people. He had said, "If you obey these laws of mine, you will be my people and I will be your God" (Lev 26: 12). The Spirit of Yahweh was with Mary and when the appointed time came for the promised one to come, she was found to be the worthy woman to be his mother. Thus Yahweh sent his angel Gabriel to a virgin in Nazareth by name Mary with the message to be the mother of the Messiah. When she accepted, she became the tabernacle of the Most High. In God's foreknowledge, she was pure and unstained. A Christian is one who accepts Jesus in faith as his/her personal savior. Mary in her life accepted Jesus her Son as her personal savior through her "*fiat*." Thus she is the first and foremost Christian and the exemplar of all Christians (Scaperlanda, 2002, p.

26). From early times Christians who wanted to live the Christian life in its totality, took Mary as their model and lived by the counsels proposed by the Gospel or the *Evangelion*.

4.1.1 Evangelical Counsels

The Evangelical counsels are Gospel values proposed by Jesus to his disciples “to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” There are several evangelical counsels but in the course of the history of the Church, three of them became very prominent due to their radicalness to uproot the self, namely obedience, chastity, and poverty. Those who embrace the “religious life” desire to live a life of self-emptying, promising freely to search for God and his will in their daily life through prayer, scripture reading, reception of the sacraments and by living the rules and constitutions of the particular congregation and the will of the superiors. It is natural for a human person to live by his own dictates, in a family with personal property to lead a comfortable life. But those who have chosen the religious life renounce all these to be the *anawim* of God, relying totally on the promises of God. This style of life is most conducive to being perfect as the heavenly Father through the emptying of all attachments to life. The Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium* has this to say of the religious life:

“...in this way, that person is ordained to the honor and service of God under a new and special title. Indeed, through Baptism a person dies to sin and is consecrated to God. However, in order that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends, by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church, to free himself from those obstacles which might draw him away from fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship. By his profession of the evangelical

counsels, then he is more intimately consecrated to divine service” (LG 44).

As mentioned earlier the religious life is a life of total commitment to God, the supreme Good, the greatest Love, the absolute Being, the *Alpha* and *Omega* of everything. In religious life, a person is encouraged to have a deep personal relationship with the person of Jesus and be able to say along with Paul “It is not I but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). The religious person’s life is dedicated “to love God with all your soul, heart and mind and to love your fellowmen as yourself” (Mt 19:19; 1Cor 7). Religious life in the Church is shaped to live this law of love in a radical manner, in its fullest sense. Therefore the document *Perfectae Caritatis*¹⁷ (PC 2e) says “The purpose of religious life is to help the members follow Christ and be united to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels.” Everything in a religious person’s day is for God.

The Christians are called by Jesus to be the “light of the world” and to be the “salt of the earth” that gives taste to society. Jesus spoke of a parable where a woman places a small amount of leaven that makes the entire dough rise, so too, the Christians who, though a small minority—perhaps will be so till the end of the world—who by their life and actions are to be leaven in the society. The early Christians were very conscious of their calling and lived accordingly. The non-Christians admired these early Christians and said, “See how the Christians love one another.” As Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire and the number of Christians increased, this ideal life became very

¹⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis* is the Second Vatican Council Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (referring to Roman Catholic religious orders).

difficult. So devout Christians formed small communities to live this ideal life, which became the model of religious life, to be witness to God's love for man. Thus throughout the history of the Church there were small groups of Christians who committed themselves to a way of life—a life that is a witness to God's love. This special way of life is called by various names "Religious life," "Committed life" or "Consecrated life."

Often persons who wish to lead a committed life are brought together by a charismatic person, called founder, to attend to a particular need in the community as well as to be a sign of God's presence in the community. These committed persons—men /women—live together following a rule, that expresses their charism and commit themselves by taking the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Commonly these individuals are called brothers or sisters. A religious person can be defined as one called by God to participate in the mission of the Church and to live God's love for all mankind by participating in the joys and hopes of the people. They carry on this mission by a variety of ministries¹⁸: teaching, caring for the sick, the orphan and the needy. The different religious groups may differ in their charism, but the life they live is one of total self surrender through emptying of self, for their own spiritual advancement and for the spiritual and moral advancement of the community of God's people.

¹⁸

Ministry refers to service based on the teaching of Christ, "I came to serve, not to be served"(Mk 10: 45). There are several ministries done by the Church through its members especially the religious. The LCU Sisters are involved in the ministries of teaching, caring for the poor, the aged, the orphans, the sick, single mothers and so on.

4.1.2 History of Religious Life

The 5th century A.D. was a tumultuous time in Europe. The barbarians overran Europe. The existing cultures were destroyed. Many thought the end of the world was immanent and took flight to the desert “to be alone with the Alone” and lead a hermitical life. St. Pachomius in Egypt, for example, gathered these hermits together and began a cenobetic life. One of the first communities was at Tabennisi by the river Nile where they spent time in prayer and manual labour (*ora et labora*) under strict discipline. Pachomius’ organization had a military lifestyle under obedience. There was considerable ideological difference between the hermitical and the monastic life. The latter required a community under obedience to a superior, as an essential principle. Besides there were numerous ascetics at this period who were neither solitary nor incorporated in a community, but wandered from place to place, and many behaved irresponsibly. So in the East, particularly in Asia Minor, St. Basil of Caesarea brought a number of these hermits to an institutional form of community life with novitiate and the solemn profession. He insisted on obedience for restraining the excesses, the competitiveness, and the ostentation of individuals who were bringing disrepute to the monastic movement.¹⁹ St. Basil wrote the first rule for the monks that emphasized a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. Severe penalties were prescribed by St. Basil for monks who set themselves to austere fasts without permission. In his continual emphasis on restraint, Basil anticipated the spirit of St. Benedict and the rule he wrote for the community known today as Benedictines (Chadwick, 1986, p.178).

¹⁹ St. Simeon, the Stylite, lived on a high pillar and his mother brought each day bread and water that were taken to the top of the pillar by a rope.

The main focus of these rules were on the Gospel demand of love and service which began to shape the communities not only in Egypt and Asia Minor, but also in Judea, Syria, Greece and others places. Thus began the movement called "Religious life" in the Church. Through the centuries many religious groups sprang up in different parts of the world to meet the different needs of the local Church and the people. Some of these Religious communities spread to various parts of the Christendom in the course of time. Bishop Lambert De La Motte established the congregation of the LCU Sisters to meet the needs of the people and Church in South East Asia.

The LCU Sisters are inspired by the spirituality, charism and mission of the Congregation founded by Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte. His vision was: 1) To continue Jesus' life of pilgrimage through this world with a deep affection for the Cross of Christ—by accepting the challenges of life joyfully; 2) To lead a life of sacrifice and prayer for the world and the Church at large, particularly for the local community in which the Sisters live and work and 3) To be the visible hand of the one mediator—Jesus Christ—between God and humankind, whereby the LCU Sisters give themselves to the service of the youth and women in the development of culture, improving health, faith and morals, along with economic life.

Following the path of serving God and his people, the LCU Sisters walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who was pure of heart, poor in spirit, and obedient to the Father. The LCU Sisters carry out their mission wholeheartedly, keeping in mind the great value of the call of God to religious life, following the spirit of the Lovers of the Cross.

4.1.3 Religious Life as Radical *Kenosis* in the Christian Self-emptying

Religious life is a special invitation for self-emptying in order to be filled with the self of God. It is living out of one's calling within a particular religious community according to the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty. These evangelical counsels are means for transformation of life through faith, love and hope. One who decides to embrace such a life publicly makes a vow in the presence of the community and the Church represented by the religious superior to follow the evangelical counsels. This public promise also enjoins the members of the religious congregation to live together responsibly, in a common spirit of simplicity, availability and attentiveness. The religious vows free one to respond to God passionately and firmly. In the spirit of "Here I am Lord, I come to do Your will" (Heb 10:7).

The vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty encompass the total self-giving of the person to God and to translate them into human terms by living it in a radical manner. This must bring about a *metanoia*²⁰ in thinking and living. It is a new way of being in the world. It is also the beginning of a spiritual quest that calls for a radical *kenosis*, a conversion from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. It is to live in the light of eternity, with the awareness of our finitude and transience of life.

St. Theresa of Avila says "All is passing, God alone is changeless" (Faricy, 1983, p. 3). The religious begins by freeing oneself from egoistic attachment to passing things of the world even those that are dear and natural to the human person. Thus one's life is

²⁰ The literal meaning of *metanoia* is "going beyond or higher than the ordinary mental state." In modern terms, it means transcending self-centered ego and becoming God-centered.

offered to God to be directed by Him through the vow of obedience. It is natural to realize one's capacity to love, through family life, now directed to the Trinitarian God and to the human community, God's children through the vow of chastity. In religious life the economic freedom to achieve the goals of one's life is directed to God, and the whole world becomes one's inheritance through the vow of poverty. Thus the religious person becomes an *anawim*, whose sole possession is God. This promise to follow the triple evangelical counsels is a radical self-emptying process to inherit the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Unless the wheat falls to the ground and dies it will not bring forth new life" (Jn 12: 24-25). The religious life involves a daily dying to the self in order to live for God at every movement of one's life, empty-handed without any luggage.

This lifestyle offers challenges and spiritual struggles. There is a desire to live the spiritual ideal of purity, on the one hand, and being enchanted by the transient, even lawful pleasures of the world, on the other. There are both attraction and disgust towards the transient "self", the "world" and the pleasures it offers. Religious life is a total *kenosis*, which the carnal man does not long for. The religious person embarks on a spiritual path which the carnal man abhors. It is a life-long struggle, between man's spiritual quest for God—the 'I Am Who Am' and the carnal man's quest for power and position. St Paul speaks of his own struggle in following his call of God (2 Cor 12:7-13). Paul was faced with the choice of leaving his calling to attend to the needs of the carnal man. He requests God to be released from it, but God asked of him to keep on, for his grace would help him to overcome it. Thus religious have to die daily to themselves to live for God whom they have chosen as the goal of their lives. They have to allow themselves to be transformed by

the great ideal of realizing God as envisaged by the founder of their congregations. With St. Paul they must be able to say: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

4.1.4 Mary, the Best Example of Committed Life

In the Church, people who wish to follow Jesus closely take Mary as the best example. As mentioned earlier, Jesus was the center of Mary’s life, so too Jesus is the center of a committed person’s life. Mary directed all her potentialities and capacities towards their full realization in God. She was at the disposal of God in the Church. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Your word” (Lk 1:38) was her continual song.

Consecrated life or religious life has always seen Mary as the model of total selflessness towards the Kingdom of God. Reflecting on the Word of God, the Church discovered in Mary the incarnated ideal of what it means to listen to the Word in Scripture and in life. Mary pondered everything in her heart (Lk 2:19, 50-51), so too, the religious ponder and reflect in their hearts the Word of God. Consecrated life perceives in the Virgin its ideal and inspiration for its service to others, as she is “the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe” (RM 37).²¹ This understanding of Mary shapes the mission of religious communities.

²¹ *Redemptoris Mater* is the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II on Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church, promulgated on 25 March 1987.

4.2 Vows as Radical *Kenosis*

Consecrated life has its inspiration in the lifestyle of Jesus with his apostles and in the lifestyle of the early Jerusalem community. It is a lifestyle for those who want to follow Christ intimately, free from all hindrances, and wanting to adopt the radical lifestyle of Jesus by putting on his mind, adopting his attitudes, and his stance on life's realities. Thus religious life today is the living again of Jesus' life with the Gospel teaching as the path, the Gospel teaching as the meaning to all reality. Consecrated life is totally evangelical, that is, of the Gospel, by the Gospel, and for the Gospel (Kattady, 2003, p. 39). It is rooted in the Gospel and is a re-living of the Gospel. No relationship with Jesus is possible without the Gospel as there is a difference between knowing Jesus and knowing about Jesus. To follow Jesus intimately the Church has singled out the basic Gospel values of obedience, chastity, and poverty as an antidote for man's inordinate desire for power, affiliation and possession.

4.2.1 Obedience and Life of Faith

The New Testament calls God *Abba*, Father. The word Father expresses in the simplest language the relation of love revealed to us through Jesus Christ towards God. This Father we talk about is the source of all things and His nature is love itself. He dwells in all as love. Obedience is to listen to this God our Father, who dwells in us.

The Christian understanding of obedience is attentive listening to the call of the Father at every moment of our life that demands our response. Obedience is listening to the Father as we see in the life of Jesus Christ. Thus obedience for Christians as well as for

the religious is to listen to God our Father. Human freedom is the anthropological ground where Christian and religious obedience has its base. Freedom and obedience are two complementary and interrelated qualities inherent in every person. Recognizing the call of the Father, the human individual freely responds to Him at every moment. It means obedient to the Father who is the source of all and the dweller in all.

4.2.1.1 Scriptural Understanding of Obedience

All who enter religious life in the Church make a promise to listen to the heavenly Father in the footsteps of Jesus whose food was to do the will of his Father. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of my Father” (Jn 4: 34). The obedience of Christ is the key to the obedience of the religious. Christian obedience cannot be understood without reference to the obedience of Jesus, who is the example of perfect obedience to the Father through the Holy Spirit. The obedience of a religious is not different from the obedience of a Christian, although by virtue of their religious profession, the religious are expected to live it in a deeper level and in a more intense manner. Mary’s life too, was one of total obedience to God in every event of her life. It was for her living her faith and trust in the fatherly care of God.

4.2.1.1.1 The Obedience of Christ

In the New Testament, Christ’s life is inspired by the filial union with the Father. Jesus’ life was a life of obedience. The Father’s will became His food, His life-blood and His sole concern as can be seen in His whole life from birth to death. The obedience of

Jesus was the fruit of His deep relationship and constant communion with His Father whom He truly loved. To be of one heart and one soul with the Father was the reason for His existence. “Behold, I come to do Your will” (Ps 40:7). “The Son cannot do anything by Himself, but only that which He sees done by the Father” (Jn 5:19). He was always attuned to the Father’s will. During his sojourn on earth, Jesus was always single-minded in fulfilling his Father’s will. His words are unmistakably clear: “For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me”; “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (Jn 6:38; 14:10). Jesus discerned the will of the Father through prayer in solitude. We see this most clearly on many occasions when he prayed that he might know what the Father wanted him to do in a given situation. For example, before choosing the twelve apostles, “he went up to the hills to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God” (Lk. 6:12).

Jesus’ life theme was “It is not my will but thine be done.” He was rejected by the Jews, and became the suffering servant of Yahweh, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering, yet the Lord was pleased to crush him with grief” (Isa 53: 3-10), “He did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave...He was humble yet, even to accepting death, death on the Cross” (Phil. 2: 6-8). He accepted all these in obedience to the Father. As man, Jesus could not understand why the Father wanted it. But he accepted and trusted in the Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus began His passion, His prayer was an act of total submission to the Father: “Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:40-46; Mt 26:36-46).

During His torture, He obeyed even His executioners; He submitted Himself to crucifixion and insult. Christ is the model *par excellence* of obedience. He was completely submissive to the will of the Father and faithfully fulfilled that will even to the last drop of His blood. He died on the cross saying: “it is accomplished”—completely conformed to the will of his Father.

4.2.1.1.2 The Obedience of Mary

The Blessed Virgin Mary as the preeminent Christian embodies in herself the Christian community’s life of obedience. At the Annunciation and at the foot of the Cross, she showed herself as a perfect model of obedience. Mary lived in obedience to Yahweh’s will as explained earlier. She said her *fiat*, ‘be it done to me—according to Thy word.’ For this reason, the Fathers of the Church²² point to the fact that the Virgin Mary conceived Jesus first in her heart in obedience and only then in her womb. Mary submitted to God’s will without knowing the path that lay before her. She persevered, choosing always faithfulness to her Son and to his Father.

“To obey in faith,” the Catholic Catechism states, “is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself.” In this sense, there is no doubt that Mary is the “most perfect embodiment” of this obedience (CCC p. 144). The *fiat* of Mary was the obedient surrender of her will to the Father and to the work of Salvation: “With her *fiat* she consecrated herself to her Son and to the work of

²² Early Church writers such as St. Ambrose, St. Gregory the Great, St. Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Jerome and so on are called the Fathers of the Church traditionally.

God” (LG 56). Hence on Calvary, Mary in obedience to God shared in her Son’s supreme act of obedience. Mary is the mother of the new community of persons who are obedient to God. By becoming the mother of Jesus, she thereby became our mother as well. Her motherly word of authority calls us to give whole-heartedly in obedience to her Son: “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2: 5).

Mary is the model for all Christians especially for the religious, in discerning and fulfilling the Lord’s will in their lives. Her way of life is a perfect pattern for them to follow. The Spirit of God was operative within Mary from the very moment she conceived Jesus and she became the temple of the Holy Spirit. Her mind, heart, soul and body were always in tune with the Lord. She was ever aware of His presence that enabled her to discern God’s will all the days of her life. In solitude she discerned the will of the Lord that guided her life. As Mary pondered and reflected upon the mysterious working of God in her life, her life became a quiet prayer of listening (Rosage, 2001, pp. 76-80).

In her quiet prayer, Mary was able to discern and recognize the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This enabled her to respond positively and willingly to the Lord’s divine will in the special vocation to which she was called. Here again Mary sets the pace. She loved the Lord with an unconditional love. Mary was eager to please God, and her unselfishness kept her alert to his inspirations and the movement of grace. Furthermore, Mary’s great love gave her keen insight into God’s mysterious plans. When she discerned God’s will for her, she accepted it unhesitatingly, with complete trust and confidence.

The Annunciation is the event of Mary’s life that most clearly reveals and highlights the perfect discernment and obedience to the Holy Spirit. Mary’s openness to

the Spirit of God, her prayerfulness and committed love make her an ideal for those who seek to discern and respond to the will of the Lord. The Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church says that “embracing God’s salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under him and with him by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption” (LG 56).

4.2.1.2 Obedience as Listening

The word obedience comes from the Latin, *audire*, which means to hear, to listen. To listen to someone points to a relationship between oneself and the other. Thus Jesus’ obedience expresses His relationship with the Father, with whom he communed (Dunne, 2001, p. 270). In the *New Catholic Dictionary of Spirituality*, obedience is defined as “receiving and responding appropriately to the message—Word—from God” (Downey, 1993, p. 709). God endows each person with a freedom to listen, to understand, and to respond to Him. Understanding demands a person’s response, which is the result of his/her free decision. Thus obedience can be seen as an attitude of attentiveness and responsiveness to the call of the Father at every moment of one’s life. In attentive listening, obedience places one in an atmosphere of openness and faithfulness “to God, to others, to life’s circumstances, to nature, to the many calls of daily living, and to respond in a manner that enhances growth” (Murchu, 1999 p. 145). Obedience to authority of religious leadership is a sacrament as it is a sign of Christ’s presence and of grace. Religious obedience, to be genuine, is to be exercised in the context of faith (Kattady, p. 42). The

document *Perfectae Caritatis* of the Second Vatican Council qualifies religious obedience as active and responsible (PC 14, 1965).

4.2.1.3 *Kenotic* Obedience

All Christians are called to model themselves after the obedience of Jesus and Mary. By the vow of obedience, the religious seek to listen to God in and through living in a religious community. In religious life, the LCU Sisters and all who lead such a life, follow the example of Mary who said “Be it done to me, according to Thy word.” In close imitation of Mary, they offer themselves to God to do His will. In fact, all human beings, like to shape their lives according to their own desire. By the vow of obedience, the religious empty themselves and “puts on the new man”—Jesus—to live in obedience to the Father’s will. This needs deep faith in God’s Fatherly care to be obedient like Jesus, Abraham and Mary, who placed themselves in the hands of God and went wherever God wanted them to go.

Obedience has nothing to do with passivity or blind identification with the wishes of another or to some written laws. It is, on the contrary, the dynamic freedom, a decision to search for the will of the heavenly Father because God is their very life, as said earlier and to listen to God at every moment of life. In obedience the religious freely submit to the will of God as manifested through personal prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, directives of the Church and their community and through the voice of the superior. They have no personal preferences and they desire nothing but the consecration of themselves to

God (Alberione, 1982, p. 46). Thus obedience is essentially listening to God. This concern for hearing the word of God and actualizing it in her life is the essence of obedience.

Religious obedience is encompassed in faith. Every act of submission or acceptance of another's will is seen as oriented not merely toward man, but toward God, in His providential design of love for His people. Thus religious obedience is a response to God's love. The Vatican Council explains the essential elements of obedience as follows:

In their profession of obedience, religious offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God's salvific will. After the example of Jesus Christ who came to do the Will of the Father, and "assuming the nature of a slave" (Phil 2:7), learned obedience in the school of suffering (cf. Heb 5:8), religious, under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors, who hold the place of God. Under their guidance they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself in obedience to the Father served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many (cf. Mt. 20:28; Jn 10: 14-18). So they are closely bound to the service of the Church and strive to attain the measure of the full manhood in Christ (PC 14).

Religious life incarnates an obedience of a distinctive character, an obedience that originates from the depths of the Church, the community of God's people. The promise made in the presence of the representative of the Church confers on obedience a sacred character. The religious take up the sacred tasks of seeking and doing God's will daily in light of the constitutions and directives of superiors. Thus the essence of obedience springs from an interior movement: the free act of inner conversion, the central decision of their will to let their life be transformed by Christ without reservation (Ridick, 1984, p. 85).

4.2.1.4 Obedience and Prayer

The religious are called to be disciples, to love, to grow in union and familiarity with God and the things of God. This is central to the vow and virtue of obedience. They are discovering the strength that comes from God and not from self. Disciples move from exterior conformity to inner listening, listening to what Jesus, the Beloved, would have done. Prayer is listening to God with love. It is also the clearest expression of one's relationship of dependence on God. The essence of prayer consists in being present to God, listening to Him and being ready to accept His plan. In prayer, one asks God to be the center of one's life, expressing the willingness to be used, as God likes it best. True prayer leads the religious to a total surrender of their lives to God who becomes everything in their lives, the fulfillment of all their needs. The love for God is expressed in the prayer of the heart. It is a heart-to-heart relationship with Him. It calls for selfless love, and living in the presence of God continually.

Personal prayer is the awareness of God's loving presence (Kattady, p. 54). Jesus, the master of prayer, was alluding to personal prayer when he told his disciples; "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mt 6: 6). Thus personal prayer is communion with the Lord from the secret of one's heart. In personal prayer one not only expresses one's personal feeling for God but also silent communion with him, where one gives the Beloved one's heart and listens to whatever He has to say to the soul. Thus personal prayer becomes contemplative prayer. Prayer is one's response to the realization that without God he/she can do nothing. Thus without providing time for union with Jesus

in personal prayer, a consecrated person will not be able to listen to Him in the Scriptures, in the fraternity and in the events of life. To be present to the others through care and concern is the outflow of personal prayer. If the religious care for the Lord, then they must make efforts to be with him in love through prayer of the heart continuously. This is the meaning when Paul says, “Pray continuously” (Eph 6:18). Thus contemplation of God will lead to love of God and to awareness of His presence. As said earlier, the hours of prayer that they spend overflow into their lives, and the events of their lives also lead them to God.

4.2.1.5 Prayer and Community Life

The religious become familiar with God’s heart and expand their hearts to embrace all in Divine compassion. Compassion has its relevance to every area of consecrated life. All members of a religious community are responsible for their own growth and that of others in the community. Prayer gives one a compassionate heart. A prayerful person accepts the foibles and idiosyncrasies of the other members of the community. A prayerful person becomes a seat beside a shade-giving tree where anyone can come and rest and renew themselves and continue their journey. Jesus said “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). It is necessary for members to clarify their expectations from each other. Moving from egocentricity to the interest of the group, from I to We, is the core of religious community living. Everyday is an opportunity to grow in the spirit of self-giving for the building up of their community. Tolerance is most necessary for peace and harmony in the community life. It is the ability to endure in

patience an unpleasant person or situation with self-control. A compassionate person would meet the suffering Christ in every suffering person encountered. The religious are called to be compassionate with all people who suffer, are poor, excluded, and marginalized. They learn how to forgive others because God has first forgiven them. Forgiveness permeates every aspect of consecrated life. Without forgiving others, one cannot obtain the gift of a pure heart, which is essential for prayer. It is the heart of community life. To forgive is to begin anew, to build up relationship again. Thus forgiveness is the ultimate response to the call of love in human, Christian and consecrated life. The religious should forgive and be gentle because that is the very nature of love and the heart of obedience.

4.2.2 Chastity: the Life of Love

The vow of chastity or virginity entails a life-long commitment to God as exemplified in the person of Mary. Among women religious it is considered as an espousal with Christ the Son of God. Therefore a committed woman religious is often called *sponsa Christi*—spouse of Christ. Men religious are called *amicus Christi*—companions of Jesus Christ. In all the great monastic systems, chastity or virginity denotes single-mindedness, an unencumbered commitment of devotion to God (Murchu, 1999, p. 40).

Virginity is unique among the vows professed by the religious. It is the only vow whose content has been a constant factor in all forms of religious life throughout history. It is also the only one of the three vows whose object is, strictly speaking, an evangelical counsel in the sense that it is a response to an invitation not addressed to all Christians. It is the defining characteristic of religious life (Schneiders, 1986, p. 114).

Chastity or virginity is freely chosen for the Kingdom of God. It is viewed as a commitment of love and not just a renunciation of marriage and sex. To view this vow merely as a renunciation has a great repercussion in the actual living out the vow of chastity.

4.2.2.1 Scriptural Understanding of Chastity

Jesus Christ is the exemplar and the inspirer of Christian chastity. It is in the life of Jesus that this virtue of chastity is perfectly lived, revealed and brought to light. He remained celibate. The Gospel evidence is decisive on this point. He remained celibate by deliberate choice in obedience to the heavenly Father who sent Him. Celibacy for Him was not against the Incarnation but in absolute harmony with it. For Jesus, to be celibate was part and parcel of His work and mission and message; it belonged to “the things of My Father” with which He was constantly concerned. Christians understand chastity of Christ in relation to purity. Purity, as defined and explained by Kierkegaard, is “to will one thing only”—to be single minded (Ridick, 1984, p. 38). Jesus is the model for them who wish to consecrate their lives exclusively and directly to God, to fulfill the heavenly Father’s will and to enthuse the human community with the Gospel of love. Christ shows us in His celibate life a way of giving ourselves totally to the Kingdom (Mt 9:12). Jesus said “ Truly I tell you, whoever has left house or wife, or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God, will receive much more in the present time; and in the world to come he will have eternal life” (Lk 18: 29-30), and also “If you come to me, without giving up your love for your father and mother, your spouse and children, your brothers and sisters,

and indeed yourself, you cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14: 26). It is to live in total communion with Christ, so one can say with St. Paul, “I live now, it is not I but Christ who lives in me, not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2: 20). This single-mindedness is often called purity of heart referring to unadulterated love for Christ. It is a call for undivided, single-hearted love. Purity as a Christian virtue is founded in love. Christian love, which is the core Christian value, is the total self-giving to the others in Christ. Christ is the Person on whom all the love of the religious is centered. It is a dying to the self in order to be reborn in Him. He is the teacher, model, and exemplar of what the love of the religious should be.

St. Paul speaks of virginity and he invites the Christians to imitate him, well aware that it is a gift of God and consequently not an obligation for everyone without distinction:

“I should like everyone to be like me, but everybody has his own particular gifts from God, one with a gift for one thing and another with a gift for the opposite. And to make it very clear so that all may understand. There is something I want to add for the sake of widows and those who are not married: it is a good thing for them to stay as they are, like me, but if they cannot control the sexual urges, they should get married, since it is better to be married than to be tortured” (1 Cor 7:7-9).

Paul explains that Christian virginity is a charism in the fullest sense of the word. This means that it is a special gift, a loving favor granted by the Holy Spirit himself to those Christians who have been chosen by the Lord to receive it. Like every other charism of the Spirit, the Christian virginity is given for the edification of the Church, to be used, to be put to work, to be of service (1 Cor 14: 4-5); it is to give light, to build up and benefit the Christian community, to bear abundant and lasting fruit “You did not choose me but I

chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (Jn 15:16); to be a source of salvation and of life for many.

4.2.2.2 Virginité and the Trinitarian²³ Love

St. John writes *Deus Caritas est*—God is love—the family of love (1Jn 4:8). Trinity is the expression of this love where the Father completely without reserve empties or pours out in love which is the Son. The self-emptying in love of the Father and the Son is the Spirit. They mirror one another. Thus God is the unity of love. Creation is the *kenosis* of God’s creative love. Thus persons and things, circumstances and events, are all seen in a single universal design that tells of God’s love. Having manifested himself as love, God showed that he not only loves men and women in infinite measure, but also wants them to enter into intimate communion with Him, who is the *Agapeic* love or self-emptying love. *Agapeic* love is the unconditional, freely given, absolute love of God who loved us first unconditionally (cf. 1Jn 4:19). His love is a Creator’s love. All creation, therefore, is the reflection of the unity and distinction proper to the one and triune God. In virginity, the religious empty themselves, all of themselves, to the God of love, to join the family of God and participate in the divine love. In virginity, the religious experience the pure love without the distinction of subject-object. In absolute selflessness of this pure

²³ Trinitarian love refers to the love of the Holy Trinity. The New Testament of the Bible speaks of God as Trinity—consisting of the three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three persons are not three gods, but one God. Trinity is one God in three persons. Trinity is a mystery.

experience the religious find their root and their meaning in the deepest level—oneness with the eternal love. This is the ideal, the path of single-mindedness of the virgin. Man's longing for God is expressed by St. Augustine in these words "Our hearts are made for thee, Lord, till they find thee, they will not rest" (Ridick, p. 56). Man loves created things for the sake of God's love. The path of virginity focuses on the One that matters.

4.2.2.3 The Virginity of Mary

Mary is the virgin mother who single-heartedly dedicated her life to Jesus the Son of God. Mary was the first believer who committed her life to her Son and in the building of God's Kingdom. She is the model of chastity and purity among Christians and religious. "Among all persons consecrated unreservedly to God, she is the first. She is also one of the most fully consecrated to God, consecrated in the most perfect way" (PI 20²⁴). Mary was conceived immaculately. Her whole life was the most perfect reflection of Divine beauty and holiness. Her holiness stems from her deep union with the persons of the Holy Trinity.

*Vita Consecrata*²⁵ affirms that

"Mary in fact is the sublime example of perfect consecration, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to Him. Mary's presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person and for the solidity, unity, and progress of the whole community. Consecrated life looks on her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son, and openness to the Holy Spirit, in the

²⁴ *Potissimum Institutioni* is the document of the Holy See on Formation in Religious Institutes CICLSAL, 1990.

²⁵ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and the World. Given 25 March, 1996.

knowledge that acceptance of the Virginal and humble life of Christ also means imitation of Mary's way of life" (VC 28).

As mentioned earlier, Mary is the example of virginity, living within the distinctive conditions of being both virgin and mother. She was a virgin-spouse. She gave her whole self, body and soul at the service of her family: her family of Nazareth and her family that is the Church. She is indeed a sign and an expression of total availability and commitment to God the heavenly Father.

4.2.2.4 *Kenotic* Virginity

Christians committed to the religious mode of life live out the radical love of God, incarnated in their own consecrated persons. The vow of chastity, is the concrete expression of a total consecration to God, which does not separate man from woman or woman from man, but overcoming all possible ambiguities, submits their life energy and capacity to love according to the imperatives or demands of the absolute Love, already present and working in the world as an eschatological reality. St. Paul suggests in the epistle to the Corinthians:

I would have you free from anxieties. He who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord how to please the Lord, but he who is married is concerned about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit, but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7: 32-35).

St. Paul is presenting an ideal of total transcendence, where one can be totally free to develop his fundamental orientation to God. Within religious calling to discipleship, the vow of chastity characteristically enables one towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The religious who embrace consecrated chastity place themselves at the total service of the Church, at the service of Redemption, following the chaste and pure Christ whose love and service extends to all people. Religious life is a particular calling and the vow of chastity enables the religious person to live in a radical manner of hope and love. The religious are called to witness to the love and relatedness of God because God's new reign has caught up with people. Loving God unconditionally involves loving one's fellowmen. The goal of chastity is to bring human nature to perfection in love, the radical love of God.

According to Thomas Kane (1982), religious vows are good example of letting go of striving for security, sensual pleasure, and power. He points out that chastity is basically a letting-go of their striving for sexual fulfillment in its physical manifestation. There is a basic call to celibacy for all religious, which is a call to freedom and transformation of sexual energy into a higher union of love. The more one is able to let go of sexual needs and transform them into a higher union, the more intense sexual fulfillment seems to be. Thus for the celibate, a true desire for God rather than sexual control is the goal (pp. 122-123).

4.2.2.4.1 Virginity for the Kingdom of God

Ridick (1984) points out that chastity "for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12) which the religious profess, must be esteemed as an exceptional gift of grace. It

frees the heart of the religious (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-35) so that they become more fervent in love for God and for men, that means the religious dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate (p. 40). He continues that consecrated virginity is the sign of the Church, the Sacrament of Christ, formed by and presenting to Him, so the virgin bears this same character of the Church within: to bring Christ's chaste, pure love to the people of God. The religious place themselves totally at the service of the Church, at the service of redemption. It is a universal love-pact with the Lord, to concern their lives "with the things of the Lord" only. Thus chastity opens them to be: for Christ, for the Word, for the Gospel (Mk 10:29).

Blais (1971) states that the charism of virginity is a gift taking the religious out of herself in an ongoing, free, and loving gift of self for the Kingdom of God. It is a call and gift to a religious who responds to this grace according to her own unique personality and according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Blais claims that virginity is a charism calling for a life of love, a life given for others. It is an affirmation, not negation of life. The virgin is a sign of the Kingdom and total commitment to God. She dies to self, and yet she lives for the Lord, she lives in a free, ongoing gift of herself to men and women (p. 53). As Lozano (1986) points out, every disciple is aware of the fundamental rule of living according to God's Word: all must love God with their whole heart, with a love that does not allow any other love to condition or limit it. To love God "with an undivided heart" is therefore, the vocation of every Christian. In rendering to God the biblical concept of the love of God more explicit, Jesus specifically linked it with the love of neighbor. To love God with an undivided heart and to place no limits to one's fidelity to Jesus are

fundamental norms for all disciples. The law of the undivided heart applies to every Christian called either to married life or single committed life. Celibates are defined by their search for the love of Christ, by their lifestyle. On the other hand, it is likewise true that the love of our neighbors can never be absent from the heart of celibates who live that lifestyle for the sake of the Kingdom. Their love becomes universal, and as such, is the source of manifold ministries. In choosing this style of life one becomes dedicated to the education and care of the families of others (pp. 167-169).

4.2.2.4.2 Virginity and Espousal with Christ

William C. Bier (1963) points out that Christian virginity is not merely a renunciation and is even more basically a gift of one's whole self to Christ. "The unmarried woman or the virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord" (1 Cor 7:34). The virgin's vocation comes in the form of a call from Christ and is embraced in imitation of Christ who gave so striking an example of virginity in His own life. Thus consecrated virginity is a spiritual marriage, a union between the virginal soul and Christ. When a woman makes a profession of religious chastity, she remains a woman, and consequently she must achieve in this profession her fulfillment as a woman. Through her espousal to Christ she becomes both mother and sister to all. Thus renunciation on one plane becomes a fulfillment in another, the natural becomes fulfillment on the supernatural. This is the pinnacle of virginity each individual religious must reach, which is a great personal challenge to her as a religious. By her profession, the religious sister becomes at once virgin spouse and virgin mother. The theme of virginity is allied to whatever is deepest in

the feminine heart, and it lies also at the center of consecration. In consecrated virginity is found one of those paradoxes which is so characteristic of Christian life: "He that shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt 16:25), and again: "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12: 24-25). By her profession of religious virginity and by her renunciation of marriage and the possibility of children, she becomes the spouse of Christ and mother of all. This is the womanly fulfillment that is unique; it is womanly fulfillment at its highest and finest. Faithfulness to the vow of religious virginity is a lofty ideal, for it involves not merely abstention from sexual acts, but even from unchaste thoughts and desires through an entire lifetime; an ideal impossible to unaided human nature, but possible with the help of God's grace. Pope Pius XII says:

"In other words, virginity is a difficult virtue. To be able to embrace it, one must not only make a firm and formal resolve completely to abstain forever from the legitimate pleasures of marriage; it is also necessary to master and check, by unceasing vigilance and unremitting effort, the rebellious impulses of the flesh and the passions of the heart; to defy the attractions of the world and to overcome the temptations of the devil" (Bier, 1963, p.105).

The fulfillment that comes to a woman who has dedicated her virginity to Christ by religious profession is, as already noted, achieved on the spiritual level whereby she becomes both spouse and mother. It follows, therefore, that she will experience fulfillment to the degree that she succeeds in living her religious life on a spiritual plane, for it is on this level and not on the natural level, that womanly fulfillment exists for her. The sex role of the woman who dedicates her

womanhood to Christ through religious virginity is a very different role from that of a woman who marries and bears children. Consequently, the religious woman has to change her ordinary consciousness to a consciousness as a woman, in God's plan, in a spiritual plane. The religious woman renounces the expression of sex on the natural plane, but she does not renounce her womanhood and consequently not her sexual role. For her, sex is sublimated, but not excluded. It is important, therefore, in order not to renounce her womanhood, which would be a crime against nature, that she thinks of herself as a spouse and mother, which she truly is—the spouse of Christ and the mother of His children (Ibid, p. 108). To live such a life of womanly fulfillment on a spiritual plane is no easy task; she can do it by the grace of God. Thus the woman can achieve her womanly fulfillment in her life of virginity only if she succeeds in living this life in union with Christ.

4.2.2.4.3 Prayer: Deepening Relationship with Christ

God is the Supreme Being, who brings everything into existence. He is present everywhere, in every event in all created things. To perceive the presence of God and communion with him constantly St. Paul admonishes, "Pray always in continuous communion with him" (Eph 6: 18). The religious woman opens herself in prayer; she is more and more convinced of God's unconditional love for her. It is in prayer that the consecrated life will be filled with the presence of Christ. This entails great fidelity to liturgical and personal prayer, to periods devoted to mental prayer and contemplation, to Eucharistic adoration, to monthly retreats and to spiritual exercises (VC 1996). However,

the religious woman not only must be convinced but also express that she is personally loved by Christ, her spouse, as she truly is, and she must give Him a personal return of love. The Sister's dedication to Christ is a very personal one and Christ's love for her is equally personal. The moments of prayer are the renewal of this personal relationship with Christ. It is not a technique, a ritual or a formality. There is no pattern to it. It is a spontaneous outpouring of the heart. This must become a continual experience—the continual awareness of being loved by Christ, His spouse and every thought and action becomes a response of love to him.

Canon Law (663#1) makes it clear that “the first and principal duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of things divine and constant union with God in prayer”. It is directed to intensify relationship with God. Consecrated life exists in the Church as a way of life pointing to the primacy of God. Since prayer is the search for God in one's life, it is in prayer that consecrated person finds its true meaning. Therefore, prayer being the most vital relationship with God and the main duty of the religious, consecrated life can find its true fulfillment only in prayer. As a religious, she is a member of a praying community. Thus a religious prays in the community, for the community and with the community.

4.2.2.4.4 Virginity and Relationship to Oneself

Roger Cantin (1971) stresses that it is rare that one has to live a life of consecrated celibacy with a perfectly balanced psyche. The religious must begin where they have left off, and not try to sanctify the ideal self—which one is not: and to try to do so would be to labor in vain—but very humbly, to endeavor to sanctify the “real me” that one is. In large

measure, this is “what is meant by carrying one’s cross daily.” One sees oneself, one accepts oneself, one loves oneself, then as God Himself sees them; they accept and they love themselves with a merciful love, not because they are good, but because He, the Lord, is good (p. 68). Jesus Christ asks the religious to love their neighbors as self; “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love of oneself is being all love. Love of another is giving a gift of oneself, which is very precious.

Virginity is a gift of oneself to God. To give oneself as a gift one must know who you are, your personal endowments, in short, the qualities and gifts you have. Not only the awareness of the self but love this self and offer it to God as one’s gift to the Lord, who in return gifts himself to you. If you do not love yourself, you cannot give yourself as a gift. Love relationship is a mutual gift giving, where the I and You become the We and the We become the I where duality disappears and union results.

4.2.2.4.5 Virginity and Relationship with Others

Robert J. McAllister (1969) says that the highest ideal of love is to see oneself as a channel of divine love, the source and the goal of all love. We become, then, the mediators of love in our caring for others, not in the abstract coldness of intellectual perception, but in the warmth of emotional affinity. God’s love flows through us to others. We give, then, not only of ourselves in loving, but open those paths of love within us and lose nothing of ourselves in that passing. Love transcends time and seeks the promise of eternal commitment. The religious woman finds such a pledge in her fidelity to her own vows. She holds this eternal commitment in the power of her love as no other woman has the force to

do. God is love. The religious woman approaches God in a way others do not. Religious women know God and know love; they cannot love perfectly, but they can love in a way others cannot. They should not strive to love as others do, but strive to teach others to love, as women of religion are capable of doing. They should be what they are—women of God, women of love; not too far removed from others so that when they are hurt, the sister will suffer with them and soothe them, so that when others are lonely, the sister will not isolate them but through her presence lead them to God, so that when others are afraid, the sister will illumine them with her vision and reassure them with the truth of her life (p. 100).

Relationship to Christ in consecrated virginity also conditions and determines one's relationship with the neighbor. Let me examine this relationship as it occurs in the religious community and in apostolic activity, and in encounters of a social nature. Every moment in a person's life from birth to death is the experiencing of relationship with others. The religious are free to expand their hearts and grow as Christians through their sharing with one another. Jesus said: "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another" (Jn 13: 35). This mystery of God's giving and loving is given to Christian's community. And also Christ asks the religious to love their neighbors. The religious life is a life of interpersonal relationships—one of Love.

4.2.2.4.6 Virginity and Community Life

Religious community is considered a faith community. As such, relationship within it will be on a Christian basis, with Christian values and motivation the determining factors in behavior. Above all, the community and its members will perceive their identity in the

light of their incorporation into Christ through baptism, sharing his life, his relationship with the Father, and his mission of salvation. For the religious, their profession is a commitment to God, Christ, and the Church through, with, and in the province. Their life will be lived in a succession of local communities, which they will enter into on a rational, and spontaneous basis. The relationship within the community is not to be compared with the orientation family they grew up in, or with the procreation family they would have established if they had married. The religious community is not a friendship group. A person does not deliberately join a friendship group; it arises and grows spontaneously. Neither is religious community a peer group: ages and interests can be very diverse.²⁶

From the local community the religious can expect that relationship is based on Christian charity; Christian trusting love, among all members; acceptance and practice of Christian values; to feel part of an apostolate-witness community with a mission; to live and work toward Christian purposes and goals, as well as goals and purposes special to the congregation; support in life and in apostolate a feeling of belonging and acceptance and a strengthening of identity. A religious community expects of each member to live according to Christian values, to join in the corporate witness through service in the manner in which the community hears itself called to live it; and to contribute to community life, including the “common life” by living according to the vows. In view of the faith nature of the community, a fundamental expectation would be the attendance of all members at community prayer. The call from God to a person to enter into a relationship with the

²⁶ The religious community is not a friendship club like any other social club. It is community of persons dedicated to the service of God and the people according to the charism of their Congregation.

community as a group comes before the call to foster deeper relationships with individual members (Manly, 1982, pp. 75-76).

The common life is like the sacrament of the love of God. Their charity animates and sanctifies the relations of human friendship, and thus brings about the withdrawal of the religious from solitude. The apostolic ministry makes use of charity, the love of neighbor. In one way or another, charity is there practiced, not only in the general intention in the motives of the vocation and which can be renewed each day, but also at the very moment and in the very act in which this ministry is being practiced. In truth, there can be no consecrated chastity without charity, and at the same time charity is increased by chastity. The religious state is defined as a striving towards evangelical perfection, i.e., essentially towards charity. It is the very object of religious chastity, it is its truth and its fruitfulness (Albert, 1963, pp. 179 -181).

The ability to love others is a quality of genuine maturity in religious life. It shows the importance of the quality for the successful living of the celibate vocation. A religious life being a consecration to God necessarily includes the love of neighbor for its true spirit. St John said "He who does not love his neighbor whom he sees, how will he love God, whom he does not see?" (1Jn 4: 20). Usually, when we speak of love of neighbor, we are thinking primarily of our neighbor as individuals. The truly mature person has not only this love of individuals, but also a devotion to the common good, a sense of his own community responsibility. Thus a religious, for instance, should realize that she is part of a group, a member of a family, and a representative of that family before others.

For the religious, life usually involves a dedication of self to the service of others, either in teaching or in the care of the sick, the orphaned, the aged, the derelict. However, this need to be useful must not only be fulfilled, but the religious must also realize that it is fulfilled. A woman needs to care and to be cared that is characteristic of her sex; she has the need to be of service to others and the need to surrender. The married woman obviously reaches fulfillment in this by her role of service in the family, by her surrendering of self. It is the woman who feels enslaved in the home, trapped within the confines of her marriage, who comes to resent her lot. Similarly, the religious who feels she is a servant in the community rather than of service to the community, who considers herself trapped by the obligations of her vows, rather than challenged by the privilege of her commitment—it is this religious who comes to resent her fate. The religious who finds the courage to surrender her own desires to the demands of the life she has freely chosen finds herself gloriously fulfilled. The religious has a need to grow, to progress, and to move ahead psychologically. Human individuals seek happiness; by nature they must do so. Since they do not have complete happiness at any one moment, of necessity they must continue to search for it, to look for something better. The religious, like everyone else, has the need to relax, to recreate. There are many psychological limitations in religious life. It is true that community life can deprive an individual of any real recreation, for recreation is largely a personal matter. A sister has a need to love and to be loved. She has these needs in the natural as well as the supernatural order. They are not satisfied by the theological virtue of charity; there are the emotional needs to give and to receive affection. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas said that man is a social animal. Loneliness is truly a cross that each

person must bear in his own manner, but friendship and love make the burden lighter (Robert J. McAllister, 1969, p. 106 -108). Thus community life must be opportunities for members of the group for the fulfillment of normal dependency needs. Members of the group should know each other well enough to react spontaneously to each other.

Religious consecration is lived out and reaches its full development in community. By her consecration, the sister commits herself to God and becomes a member of a religious institute. By so doing, and by living in community, she becomes witness to the presence of the Kingdom, announces it and works for its coming. By living in a specific community united around the Word of God and the Eucharist, Sisters take on a specific communal mission, in order to transform the world by collaborating in Christ's saving mission. As in community life, the exercise of apostolic activity or of some responsibility within the community can be fulfilled in her consecrated celibacy. Consecrated persons are in mission by virtue of their very consecration. They show through their lives the relationship that exists between consecration and mission. The call to consecrated life is a call to the prophetic task of being at the service of God and humanity. To carry out this service appropriately, consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God and awareness of the challenges of the times. It is a call to work according to God's plan by active and effective involvement in current events, discerning the signs of the times (VC, 73). Just as every action of Christ is interpreted in the context of love, so too everything for the fulfillment of the mission of consecrated life is to be done by loving others with the heart of Christ (VC, 75).

4.2.2.4.7 Virginité and Apostolic Life

The religious who consecrates her virginity to God in an apostolic community is an apostle who is chosen and sent to proclaim the Good News of God's love for man. According to the Gospel, the apostles are to act like yeast in the dough. They must work for change through transformation, not withdrawal. The religious are dedicated to the service of the Church, to the mission of spreading the Good News, by inviting others to accept God's love. The religious is also the eschatological symbol of the Kingdom of God, which is the complete integration of the whole cosmos in Christ at the end of times. As a living symbol of Christ's love on earth, the religious, by the fact of their being, work as a powerful catalyst in transforming human community to the Kingdom of God. Through the devotion and dedicated service of the religious, God works wonders in the world. However, every religious in her apostolate should be able to find some time for devoting herself directly to the needy and the poor, the sick and afflicted. Through the practice of celibacy the religious is called to universal love. So the celibate apostle of Christ has to concretize in the world her universal love. Because it is potentially universal, this love should be available to all and no one should be excluded from his service (Vineeth, 1980, p. 123).

Being a true apostle, the religious loves all people, and seeks to make them partakers of the supreme Good. It is certainly true that religious institutes have an important role to fulfill in the sphere of works of mercy, assistance and social justice; it is clear that in carrying out this service they must always be attentive to the demands of the Gospel. The Church and society itself need people capable of devoting themselves totally

to God and to others for the love of God. Being witness of life is at the very heart of the apostolate. It can be said that consecrated persons are “in mission” by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their institute (VC 72).

The LCU Sisters as an apostolic community carry out their essential mission in the Church through a variety of ministries according to their individual capacities and apostolate possibilities open to them. About 80 % of the members work in the dioceses. Besides teaching in schools, the Sisters care for parishioners, the sick, the poor, the elderly, assist troubled families, uphold the dignity of womanhood, and care for Aids patients, drug addicts, orphans and single mothers. The LCU Sisters are invited to live the life of the Gospel amidst the people of God to bring joy to humanity which is not an easy task. With simplicity and humility they may be in a better position to serve. This simplicity goes hand in hand with creativity with the mystery of the Cross as their center. All members of the congregation are exhorted to look to the Cross for inspiration and courage to carry on their mission in proclaiming the Good News for the salvation of God’s people in the world. We have seen that Pope John Paul II reminded the religious persons of the significance of the apostolic work of consecrated life. More than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. So the Lambertian apostle is willing to consecrate, offer, and give herself to the Son of God, to continue His pilgrim life, and to sacrifice until the end of the world (Lambertian refers to Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte who founded the Congregation of the LCU Sisters). Like Christ and with Christ the Lambertian apostle is called to serve her brothers and sisters to bring them

happiness by her life of prayer, sacrifice, and spirit of mediation in all her works, knowing that she has been sanctified and sent out to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all people.

For the LCU Sisters, living consecrated virginity means keeping their hearts undivided and offering their whole being to Christ, their only Spouse. With Christ, the Sisters work joyfully for the Kingdom (Mt. 19: 10-12). They carry in their hearts the mark of the Cross, so that the grace of Christ might liberate them from all carnal passions, and the Father's love might fill their emptiness and loneliness, and their union with the Holy Spirit might unite them with all people in the Heart of the Redeemer (Cons. 1999). Thus consecrated chastity is a profound symbol of the covenant of love between Christ and His Church, and at the same time is a sign of the future life of the new humanity. Therefore the LCU Sisters must understand that consecrated chastity is both the result of a free commitment and a special gift from God. This gift can be protected and developed only by a deep spirit of humility, a life of prayer and intimate union with the Crucified Christ.

In conclusion, since love comes from God and "in love there can be no fear...we have to love...because He loved us first." St John points out that love means to be open to another, to be present to another because this is the only way the religious find growth. It is the bond that relates the human with God and with one another. True love implies seeking the happiness and welfare of the others. Love is not clinging to one another in the fear of an oncoming disaster but a meeting in acceptance, trust, and respect that allows for the creation of new life, and of new persons. For the religious journeying along the path of life, it is necessary to check regularly the quality of their relationship with self, God and with

others. True relationship is shown in ways of appreciation, caring and support in their own religious communities and for those they serve. This is the way a religious will live her consecrated celibacy, that is, through warm, wholesome, human relationships. To live a life of consecrated celibacy means to build up a religious community of true love and friendship which is extended to all they come in contact with at different levels. This in turn requires the ability to relate with others and with self. This is absolutely necessary to grow as persons, as Christians, as religious. However, consecrated chastity is a radical way of living according to the Gospel in as much as the strong urge for human intimacy is replaced by exclusive dedication to God. Therefore the religious choose to share love with their community and all of God's people and not make a commitment to one particular person. This enables the religious to love everyone with the love of Jesus Christ.

4.2.3 Vow of Poverty and Life of Hope

The theological foundation of Christian poverty is to be found in Christ Himself. Through Him, with Him, in Him, and for Him, the Christians find meaning and joy in living their Christian and religious life—a *kenotic* life characterized by a total and joyous dependence upon the Heavenly Father, who is the source of all graces and blessings.

Mankind is concerned about realizing his own possibilities, his future. One's future depends more on possibility than on actuality. It is in the light of future possibilities that people live. Men and women are persons of hope. Life is very uncertain yet they live in the hope of a tomorrow. They hope that they will live tomorrow. They plan for tomorrow. Every man and woman lives in the hope of realizing all their possibilities. Whatever their

religious beliefs are, whatever their pains and sorrows are, they look for a beautiful tomorrow. The religious who have surrendered their body, heart, mind and soul to God are also concerned about realizing the Godliness that is within their lives. They desire the total transformation of their being into that of Christ, the God manifest as the highest possibility and strives to become *alter Christus*, another Christ. The Christians are called to live the life of hope because they meet God in Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, there is no hope. St. Paul in Ephesians 2:12 describes the condition of those who do not hope in Jesus Christ as “having no hope, for faith leads to hope.” All faith and hope must be in God (1 Pet 12:21). The center of Christian hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead who promised eternal life to all who believe in Him. That was the thought of Peter’s inspired writing, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

Faith is central in the exercise of obedience; love in chastity; and hope in poverty. Hope is the theological virtue, by which the Christian trusts in the promises of God in Christ and considers everything else as trash. It is the expectation that the promises of God will come to fruition in the eschatological time (Eschatology is the doctrine dealing with death, resurrection, judgments and immortality, the last realities of human life). Therefore He lives in the world but not of the world. He is a *homo viator*, a pilgrim in this world, with no permanent home. To hope then is to trust God’s promises in Jesus Christ which is enlivened by the constant experiences of the goodness, generosity and abundance of God’s love. Religious life is the embodiment of faith that leads to hope through the radical

poverty voluntarily embraced in imitation of Christ who had no place to lay his head “The birds have nests the foxes have holes but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Mt 8:20). Hope consists in the total abandonment of oneself into the hands of God. It is living trustfully, giving one’s life into the hands of God, like Francis of Assisi who even threw away the clothes he wore before the Bishop of Assisi, telling his father Peter Bernerdone “Till today I called Peter Bernerdone my father, from now on God is my Father.” And it is said the Bishop of Assisi embraced Francis covering him with his own robes. This is the ideal of Christian poverty. Jesus as a human individual could not understand the meaning of his untold suffering and death; so He prayed “Father, if you are willing, take away this bitter chalice from me; yet, not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22: 42). And in total nakedness he died on Calvary between two thieves. He abandoned his life into his Father’s hand “Into your hand I commend my spirit” (Lk 23: 46) His final words were “It is accomplished.” The call to evangelical poverty is to abandon all this world can offer, hoping only in the promises of God. Christ taught poverty not only by His words but also by example; in fact, from His birth to His death, He lived the life of an *anawim*—the poor of Yahweh, rich in the world to come.

4.2.3.1 Scriptural Understanding of Poverty

In the Old Testament spiritually the poor are called the *anawim*—people who are of Yahweh. In the Scriptures poverty is synonymous with piety, humility, and trust in Yahweh (Ps 9-10; Jer 17:14). The poor were oppressed by the powerful in the Old Testament times and prophets like Amos and Jeremiah rose up to defend them from social

injustices and proclaim Yahweh's protection of them. Their dispossession made them open to God's gifts. They were the humble and the weak who felt their own nothingness and their complete dependence on God. The rich felt no need of Yahweh and drifted into self-satisfied security. The *anawim*—the poor of Yahweh, the spiritually poor, the pious servants of the Lord, their suffering, their need, found their fulfillment in Yahweh. Job is an example of the *anawim*, who clinged to Yahweh and hoped in Him. God's protection of the *anawim* was celebrated in liturgical prayers, some of which have come down to us in the Psalms: "O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me...O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time on and forevermore" (Ps.131). Jesus who died for others, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering" (Is 53:3). And "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer..." (Is 53:10).

In the New Testament, poverty appears with varying, one might even say, with distinct meanings. Matthew and Luke in their Gospels follow the rich Old Testament tradition of spirituality of the poor. They write that "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Mt. 5:3); "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20). The Messiah appears as the Messiah of the poor (Mt 11:5). He Himself is poor (Mt 21:5) and meek and humble of heart (Mt 11: 28-30). Matthew points out that the *anawim* are those who meet God's mercy in their oppression.

Following the tradition of the New Testament times, the poor were clearly defined as the meek and the humble of heart. They were the faithful remnants, the friends of the Lord. Mary stands out as their finest example of the *anawim* who hoped in Yahweh and

her *Magnificat* is a beautiful summary of *anawim* spirituality. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior for He has looked with favor his lonely servant" (Lk 1: 46-48). Mary was poor in this world's goods, though not destitute, but her real poverty consisted in her need for God and her complete openness to the divine will. The true spirit of poverty is shown in the Gospels:

This is why I tell you not to be worried about food, and drink for yourself, or about clothes for your body. Is not life more important than food and is not the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow, they do not harvest and do not store food in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than birds? Which of you can add a day to his life by worrying about it? Why are you so worried about your clothes? Look at the flowers in the fields how they grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his wealth was clothed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass in the field - which blooms today and is to be burned tomorrow in an oven, how much more will he clothe you? What little faith you have! Do not worry and say: What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? Or: what shall we wear? The pagans busy themselves with such things; but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your heart first on the Kingdom and justice of God and all these things will also be given to you. Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Mt 6: 25-34).

To seek first the Kingdom of God is to live this spirit of detachment for the sake of the Kingdom. A Christian is a pilgrim in this world using the things of the world without clinging to them. He lives in the world but not of this world. The first Beatitude, both in Matthew and Luke, identifies the poor in spirit, as those who possess the Kingdom now, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). Luke promises this to the actually poor; Matthew to the spiritually poor. But both authors see life

in terms of detachment and the hope of possessing the Kingdom of God and of the relationship between spiritual enrichment and a personal or human poverty.

Matthew even presents Jesus as the compassionate, the suffering servant (Mt 11:2-6; 11:25-26; 12:15-21). Luke sees poverty and wealth in their social reality. Luke begins the mission of Christ, the Messiah, using the words of prophet Isaiah expressing the profound meaning of Jesus' ministry (Isa 61:1-2). Jesus has been anointed by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind. Luke writes "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19). However, in Luke the blessedness of the poor and the hungry consists in the fact that God is going to establish his reign that will take away all suffering and poverty. Discipleship for Luke, more than for Mark and Matthew, demands the dispossession of all things by distributing them among the poor (Lk 18: 22). St. Anthony of Egypt hearing this at the Sunday Eucharistic celebration went out and gave everything away, even slaughtered the oxen and cooked the meat with fire made of the wood that yoked them. Acts 4: 34 describes that there was no needy person among the early Christian community in Jerusalem as they shared all that they had among themselves—a clear sign of the messianic times.

In the Scriptural invitation to poverty, we see that God proposes a way of life which remedies the old concupiscence of greed. He reminds us that in order to follow Him, we must leave all things hoping in the eschatological blessings.

4.2.3.1.1 The Poverty of Jesus Christ

Jesus' whole life was a life of an *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh. So He could say: "The foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man does not even have whereon to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). He proposed this ideal to all who came to Him for eschatological blessings. The young man who came to ask what he should do to have life eternal, Jesus counseled him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Mt 19:16-21). The young man went away sad, says the evangelist, because he had great possessions. Jesus Christ promises blessedness to the poor in spirit, and challenges the rich young man. He places the same challenges to all who come to Him:

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who cares only for his own life will lose it; he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10: 37-39).

He advocated radical renunciation. His ultimate self-abandonment of Himself on the Cross speaks of the essential import of poverty. According to the Scripture, religious poverty is to be poor like Christ who, for our sake, became poor, even though He was rich, so that by poverty they might become rich (cf 2 Cor 8: 9). Christ's poverty was His self-emptying unto death, giving His life, even giving up His own divinity. The Son of God became as poor as He possibly could, taking on the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8: 3; Phil. 2:7). Christ's poverty was not primarily a socio-economic condition, it was an attitude of heart and soul that disposed Him to say "Behold, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:

5-7), and an openness that allowed Him to say in life, “I always do things that please the Father” (Jn 6:38) and in death, “It is consummated” (Jn 19: 30). His poverty, like all Christian poverty, is an inner attitude that manifests itself in a lifestyle of total detachment, possessing everything, yet possessing nothing. It was a spirit of openness and generosity to God in the realization of eschatological Kingdom.

Jesus’ whole life was a clear manifestation of self-emptying (*kenosis*). He showed us the value of simplicity of life and sharing not only of materials goods but also of spiritual goods. The external manifestations of Christ’s poverty are the expressions of an inner reality, something deeper and interior such as when He made Himself subject to physical pain, to the lack of material things, to the need of growing and learning. He was subject to passion and death, subject to contradiction, misunderstanding, betrayal, slander, and insults – and these are painful experiences of human poverty (Thadathil, 1999, p. 151). But despite all this, he trusted his Father and hoped in Him—as exemplified in his resurrection and ascension and sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

4.2.3.1.2 The Poverty of Mary

Mary is the first and foremost among the poor of Yahweh as I mentioned earlier “She stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently awaits and receives salvation from Him” (LG 55). The poor here are those who fear God, who depend on Him for everything. Thus the *Magnificat* is a God-centered song, is the prayer of one of the “poor of God.” The song continues: “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from

their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Lk 1: 51-53). The poor are the lowly and the hungry who need God. Mary was a poor one of God because she belonged to the true Israel who waited for God to keep His promises in the Old Testament. She was a simple and humble woman who shared the situation and condition of the women of her time.

Since she was poor, the announcement of the Reign of God by the angel Gabriel was transformed for her, into Good News. She was the first among the poor who received the Good News, the Gospel. She experienced in advance the first Beatitude “Blessed are you poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours” (Lk 6:20). According to Luke, the evangelist, Mary was set in the grand tradition of the *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh. With them, she shared patience, a lovely and indomitable trust in God, an ardent expectation of the Kingdom, and poverty of Spirit. Mary represents the poor, humble in Israel, who hoped for all things from the powerful intervention of Yahweh.

Mary, in her *Magnificat*, knows and confesses that she has God on her side. She does not trust in human powers or violent power, but only in the arm of God. The *Magnificat* is the proof that Luke identified Mary among the spiritually poor. It must be stressed that the Reign of God takes on the appearance of the little, the poor, the humble and the simple. It is the Kingdom announced and inaugurated in poverty and humility for the poor and humble. The figure of Mary fits perfectly within this context. She is the humble handmaid, poor in her virginity (Cristo Rey, 1995, pp.10-11).

St. Joseph, foster-father of Jesus and the spouse of Mary, too, belonged to the poor of Yahweh. Together they maintained the family by working with their hands. Moved by

love, they embraced the salvific will of God wholeheartedly and devoted themselves entirely to the person and the work of their divine Son and together with Him and in dependence upon Him, they offered themselves to the service of the redeeming mystery.

Poverty freed Mary from the preoccupation of personal interests that enabled Mary to find all her riches in Christ and in the Church. The maternity of Mary is the exaltation of the poor and humble ones; God asks something from those who are truly poor. Mary trusted in God and offered her life to Him. Religious poverty, if it is authentic, is one of the greatest treasures of the Church. Mary is an excellent example of the *anawim* who hoped in the promises of God.

4.2.3.2 *Kenotic Poverty*

According to Faricy (1983), poverty in consecrated life is striving to live free of attachment to material things. That is the way Jesus lived, who had “nowhere to lay His head,” and He trusted in the Father to take care of his needs. In consecrated life, people try to live non-possessively or to use the often repeated phrase—emptying of all that is not centered on God. That is what Jesus meant when He gave us the first Beatitude “Blessed are the poor in Spirit: the reign of God is theirs” (Mt 5:3) that makes them at the disposal of God and his people. Poverty in spirit is to become single-minded and single-hearted, to have God as the only one necessary in life—*the unum necessarium*. Therefore people in consecrated life strive to be totally empty to be filled with God’s Spirit. Religious poverty is a charism of following Jesus Christ, the poor, the *anawim*. “Religious poverty at the most profound level is a special gift from the Lord before it can be a response to the Lord’s

love. It is precisely this gift, this charism, that empowers them to respond to the Lord's love by living their commitment to poverty."

Poverty is an internal attitude of availability to serve the Kingdom of God in its eschatological dimension. It is a profession of love like the two other counsels of virginity and obedience. Love of God is the sole motive of living the vow of poverty. Real poverty implies freedom from all that binds man to this world as well as freedom to accept all that happens to us—God's manifestations of love in our daily living. Vineeth (1980) points out that poverty is *kenosis*, an emptying of the self that involves renunciation. The notion of *kenosis* has its origin in the Incarnation of Christ, who renounced his divine state and became man to make man divine. The religious renounce everything for building a new world and a new heaven centered on Christ as prophesized by St. John in the book of Revelation. Poverty with its utter unselfishness and prophetic courage proclaims the advent of such a world, wherein all things are of all men, and all men are of Christ (p. 49). Pope Paul VI spoke to the religious as follows:

"The poverty of Christ is essentially a liberation, an invitation to a new and higher life where the goods of the spirit, not earthly goods, have supremacy... It is the best condition for entering the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt. 5:3). It is an invitation to love. The spirit of poverty consists in an internal love of poverty, resulting in complete detachment from all earthly things. "To love," continues the Holy Father, "it is necessary to give; to give it is necessary to be freed from selfishness, to have the courage of poverty" (James Alberione, 1982, p. 40).

The *anawim*, the poor man of God is one who gazes steadfastly toward heaven and flies freely to God. St Paul says, "Those who run in a race do not load themselves down

with excess baggage, but wear only what is strictly necessary, so as to run more freely” (cf. 1Cor 9:25). Those who love poverty make greater progress toward spiritual transformation. They are not burdened by the attachment to things of this world and make themselves fit for the heavenly race. It is a poverty that makes the religious “poor both in fact and spirit” (PC 13).

Poverty is a conditioned “lifestyle” that leads the religious person to spiritual transformation, to live, like the poor of Yahweh, in humility, in resignation, in complete availability. It is the basic step in the ladder of holiness. By the vow of poverty the religious also renounce the right of remuneration for the work they accomplish in the congregation. This vow calls for leading simple, uncomplicated lives, unburdened by attachments to fame, honors, power, and material goods. They can be empty enough to be filled with the only Good that matters: the compassionate love of God. The religious embrace poverty, not out of hatred for the world, but out of love for God. It enables them, like Jesus and because of Jesus, to focus all their attention on their relationship with the Father (Billy, 2000, p. 62).

In my understanding, poverty is simplicity of life. To fulfill the vow of poverty the religious hold all things in common. In living simply, they choose to share their time, talent and resources to fulfill their mission of service to those in need. The vow of poverty is a witness against greed and aspires to a just distribution of resources. Simplicity is an important part of living the vow of poverty. It means openness to the beauty of the present, whatever its shape, whatever its lack. It can lead to a certain freedom of mind and spirit. The vow of poverty leads the religious to imitate Jesus Christ, who, for their sake, became

poor, although he was rich. It helps them to be poor in Spirit as well as in fact, and to live a life of labor and moderation. Through this vow the religious give up the right to control or benefit from personal property and commit themselves to live interdependently with a community, according to its Constitution. Thus, community life offers a shared vision and mission, and provides support and challenge. Together, the religious create their goals and visions in the hope of healing and transforming the world through Gospel values. Living together in a community totally committed to God's love and striving to live "the spirit of poverty" assist them in living their covenanted relationship with God. The purpose of this vow is to free them from being fascinated by material things so that they may be free to serve others.

4.2.3.3 The LCU Sisters and the Vow of Poverty

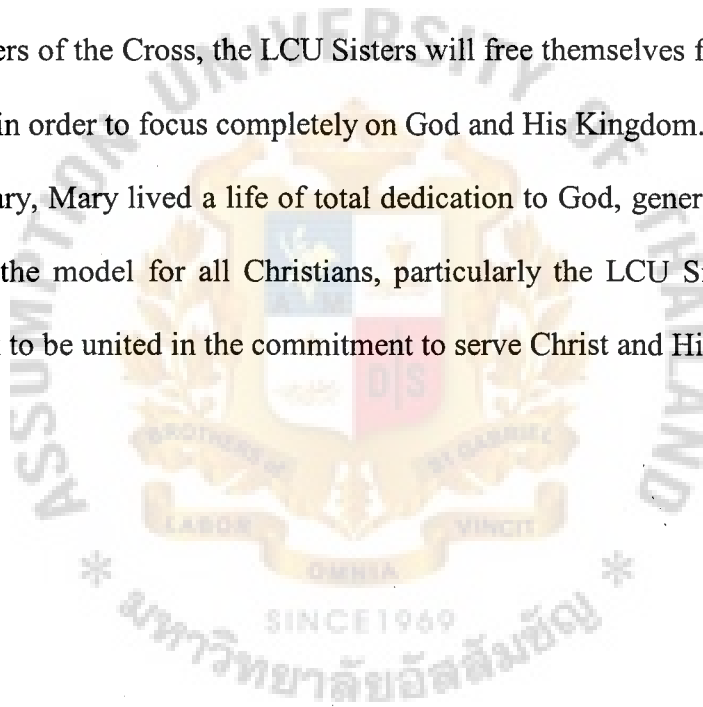
Christ, though He was rich, made Himself poor, as mentioned earlier so that by His poverty we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). Jesus humbled Himself and emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, being born in poverty, earning His living by working with His hands, and accepting privation while proclaiming the Good News of salvation to the poor (Phil 2: 6-7; Lk 2:7; Mk 6:3; Mt 8:20). He invited His disciples to leave everything and to come and follow Him, promising that they would be happy, and that their reward would be great in Heaven. The Sisters belonging to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross are required to follow the footsteps of Jesus the poor who suffered and died on the Cross. Thus the Cross becomes the sign of the mystery of the emptying of self, the summit of redemptive poverty, and the proof of Christ's dedicated love for the Father and

all people (Cons. no. 48). Mary and Joseph are models not only for the poor and the humble (LG 55) but also for those who are righteous and who live according to their faith and keep His commandments (Lk 2: 27, 39). The founder of the LCU Sisters, Bishop Lambert de La Motte offered to the members an example to follow the crucified Lord. The Bishop's life is a shining example of this simple and committed life. His generosity and readiness to share and help the members have given them strength to keep the spirit of the Congregation alive until today. The tradition of the Institute over the course of years has carved out for the LCU Sisters a lifestyle—to live a simple and hardworking life among the poor people with an eye to the eschatological Kingdom.

By the vow of poverty, the LCU Sisters imitate the first Christian community and follow the teaching of their founder who desired that they place all goods in common; the Sisters consider that all goods belong to all. Each Sister presents her needs to the superior and to the community, and accepts cheerfully what is given to her from their limited resources. In a spirit of poverty and austerity the Sisters are willing to accept their assigned duties with all their joys and hardships, firmly believing that labor is the common lot of all people. As the Scripture says, “from the sweat of his brow man shall earn his living” (Gen 3: 19). Labor is the principal way of providing for the needs of the community and the individuals themselves as well as serving others, especially the poor. By the virtue of poverty the LCU Sisters are expected: (a) to grow in the spirit of frugality in the use of material things; and (b) practice moderation and self-control in everything (Cons. p. 39). Each community, according to its ability, should share its material and spiritual goods with other communities, and should make contributions in response to the needs of the local

Church and the poor. Each Sister, and each community are asked to witness to evangelical poverty by working for social justice and protecting the rights of the marginalized and downtrodden people and to proclaim the Good News of our heavenly Father's Love for all. This demands a prompt and selfless attitude of service to all, especially the poor, with a special concern for improving their condition of life. They live a serene life of joy in the midst of all adversities, in illness and in old age and even in death as servants of the Lord. Besides, they also search for new practical ways to live the vow of poverty in their society that comes from the deep spirit of total surrender to the crucified Lord. Thus true to the name of the Lovers of the Cross, the LCU Sisters will free themselves from worldly wealth and attachments in order to focus completely on God and His Kingdom.

In summary, Mary lived a life of total dedication to God, generously responding to His call. She is the model for all Christians, particularly the LCU Sisters. In Mary, the LCU Sisters seek to be united in the commitment to serve Christ and His Church.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

I have been on a personal journey of discovery in this research to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of *kenosis* particularly as found in the life of Mary who is the model of discipleship for the LCU Sisters.

5.1 Summary

This study has examined the issue of *kenosis*, the paramount mystery in understanding life in God, Creation, Redemption and Christian life. The writer has examined the life of *kenosis* as Mary lived, particularly in connection with the *kenotic* life of the LCU Sisters. Thus the claim of this thesis has been stated as “Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, is the Prototype of *kenotic* life of the LCU Sisters in their fidelity to God and in the service of the *anawim* of God. In the process of developing this thesis the researcher has answered the following questions:

- How did Mary’s *kenotic* life witness to the Kingdom of God?
- How is Mary’s *kenotic* life the example for the committed life of the LCU Sisters?

The personality of Mary is characterized by self-emptying or *kenosis*. She was a woman of faith who emptied herself of all selfishness to cling to God. Mary was ever conscious of the Lord’s presence in her and was sensitive to the whisperings of God. Mary actively participated in bringing about the Messianic Kingdom throughout her life.

Mary was both Mother and first disciple of Jesus. She is the model of Christian discipleship. She gave her unconditional “Yes” to God at the Annunciation

by saying “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Mary’s faith and humble submission to the will of God is the language of consecrated life. In the light of the New Testament by her singular consecration to God, every event in Mary’s life was seen and lived in reference to God. She was totally taken up by the Spirit of God. Eddie Doherty (1994) explained that the spirit of Mary is the spirit of God because she never acted by her own spirit but always by the spirit of God. This perfect consecration of Mary is the ideal of religious life in the Church—living the vowed life of obedience, chastity and poverty.

Mary’s whole lifestyle charts the course for religious renewal in the Church. Responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council, the LCU Sisters are in the process of renewing, updating and vitalizing their life and mission. In faith the Sisters come together in communities to form a spiritual family with “one heart and one mind” as the early Church community (Acts. 4: 32). This spiritual family both supports and nourishes the members and challenges them to live fully the Gospel life and to build a community of faith centered on Christ.

Through the living of the evangelical counsels the LCU Sisters are urged to empty themselves of all that is self-centered and are introduced to the life of the Trinity and become brides of Christ. Freed from the constrictions of exclusive love through living their vowed life, they become available for the mission of the Church according to the community’s charism to serve the poor of Yahweh. The LCU Sisters responding to the call of God like Mary, radically empty themselves in imitation of the One who for their sake emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant.

5.2 Conclusion

The significant findings of this research are the following:

* *Kenosis* of self in order to be filled with God is the goal of committed religious life and living it by being sensitive to the whisperings of God in their lives. Mary lived a radical life of self-emptying through the promptings of God.

* The Sisters' devotion to Mary must primarily consist in transforming them to be another Mary in their attitudes, values and lifestyle. Like Mary, the Sisters must be keenly responsive to the movement of God and the Word of God in their lives in order to be able to share it with their brothers and sisters.

* Prayer for the Sisters is a time of personal intimacy with the Divine Master with burning love for Him that helps them to receive His peace, joy and love particularly in moments of pain, misunderstanding and the struggles of life. Mary shows them how to listen to God and His Words in the Scripture, to see His loving hand in every event of their lives and to live it with all its demands. Through the vow of obedience, the Sisters renounce their will and seek to do the will of God as Mary did.

* The vow of virginity centers on the intimate relationship with God. Mary was fully committed to God in her virginal love. Virginity makes the consecrated person the bride of Christ. Every act of living becomes an expression of this love for Christ. Interior silence becomes important in order to be alone with the Divine beloved. It is a heart-to-heart communion with God. The vow of virginity transforms the Sisters into women of love like Mary. Living in community becomes the realization of this love, being perceptive to the needs of one another in one's

community in which they live and work. Jesus identified himself with the people particularly the downtrodden as he said “Whenever you gave a cup of water to the least of my people, you did it to me” (Mt 10:42). Thus every act of kindness becomes an act of service to the beloved.

* Mary was a poor woman who totally depended on God. She trusted in divine providence. God was her everything. Likewise, the vow of poverty plays a unique role in transforming the Sisters into women of love. They become totally detached from everything in order to cling to God, their first love. Being human they face frustrations, disappointments, sickness and loss of dear ones and so on. Yet they have to share their being and having with the needy and poor around them. In the midst of all these they take shelter in the shadow of His wings, hoping in the covenanted promises of God. The Sisters who live in this hope will hear the words of the Lord at the end of their lives: “Come my beloved to the place that I have prepared for you” (Mt 25: 34).

* *Kenosis* has a special place in the lives of the LCU Sisters because the *kenosis* of Jesus found its ultimate expression on the Cross. Mary was a witness to the ultimate *kenotic* love of Jesus on the Cross. On mount Calvary there was a merging of the *kenosis* of Jesus on the Cross and the *kenosis* of Mary beneath the Cross. By identifying herself with Jesus her Son, Mary became the co-redemptrix. Therefore the Sisters who are the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon are intimately linked to the mystery of the *kenosis* on the Cross and beneath the Cross.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher would like to propose the following topics for further research:

1. The place of *kenosis* in the teachings of other religions like Buddhism.
2. The influence of globalization on the *kenotic* ideal of religious life in our times.
3. The role of the members of religious communities to assist individual members as they pass through life crisis at different stages of their lives.



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Appendix

History of the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon

Biography of the Founder Bishop Lambert de La Motte

Bishop Pierre Lambert de La Motte was one of the founders of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (La Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris—MEP) and the first of the Society who came to evangelize the Far East. He was born on 15 January 1624 in Lisieux, France, of a pious Catholic noble family. The family consisted of jurists, lawyers, and judges. He graduated from law school and became a lawyer in Paris. He was appointed a juridical advisor and remained there for nine years. He resigned because he wanted to examine his vocation, how God was calling him to serve Him. He was ordained a priest on 27 December 1655. He was consecrated Bishop of Beirut on 17 August 1658. He was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Cochin China, also responsible for the provinces of Sichuan, Guangdong Guangxi, and the Hainan Island of China. The Archbishop of Tours assigned him to a mission on 2 June 1660 in Paris. He left Paris on 18 June 1660 together with Fathers François Deydier and Jacques de Bourger. They arrived in Ayutthaya, the capital of Thailand on 22 August 1662. Cochin China their destination was facing so severe a persecution that they were not able to enter it, so they decided to stay in Ayutthaya first (Khongyoo, 2002, pp. 27-28).

In 1667, Bishop Lambert de la Motte intended to found the Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross but did not find a suitable location. However, he started to compose the Rules for this Congregation. Finally, on 19 February 1670, he presided over the Ash Wednesday Eucharist and founded the Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross for

women in Vietnam. He gave them the Rules he had composed in Ayutthaya. Thus, the first female Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross was founded in Hanoi, Tonkin Vietnam. The following year, he founded another Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross in Cochin China and gave them the same Constitutions as he had given in Tonkin. Around 1672, he founded the Congregation in Siam for the first time. The Congregation was founded to help the Church in various apostolic activities (Ibid, pp. 29-32).

Bishop Lambert de la Motte did not live a long life. He was not healthy even when in France. He endured only 17 years of hard work and difficulties in the missions (Wannachaiwong, 1999, p. 38). After Bishop Lambert de la Motte returned from Cochin China, he suffered from kidney disease. He was operated on and three stones were found in his kidney. He experienced much pain and suffering from this illness for about ten months before his death on 15 June 1679 at the age of 55. He was buried at the cemetery of St. Joseph in Ayutthaya (Costet, 1995, p. 43).

History of the Congregation of the LCU Sisters

In Ubonratchathani the Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross was established by Rev. Father Jean Baptiste Prodhomme, one of the early French Missionaries in 1889. He started a center for the young women who wanted to lead religious life in order to help the apostolate of the mission, especially catechism and classroom teaching. Eighteen women applied for formation in the first year, endorsed by different parishes priests. The primary purpose was to form young women who applied to postulancy in religious life. Furthermore, Sisters should be prepared to teach in schools, run the orphanages, and teach catechism in parishes. In 1894, the first group of 9 novices took their vows, and in

1895, two more. The first 15 years, (1889 –1904) saw very slow development of the Congregation. There was little increase in membership due to the following obstacles:-

In 1898, there were drought and severe epidemic in Northeastern Thailand. The superiors of the mission started to build a convent but with famine in the region, the mission lacked funds and materials to help the new Congregation. They then halted the construction and asked the novices to go back to their parents because they could not afford the formation program.

Fr. Prodhomme let the novices after their vows to help in the apostolate of their home parishes. But Bishop Marie-Joseph Cuaz, who became the Apostolic Vicar of Ubon toward the end of 1899, considered this a potential harm to religious life. He set up a new rule that the Sisters must work in other parishes away from home. The Sisters obeyed but after a year, most left the Congregation rather than renewing their vows. Among the first 12, only 2 remained (Khongyoo, 2002, pp. 36-38).

For 36 years (1904-1940) the St. Paul de Chartres Sisters worked in Ubon Mission and managed the Lovers of the Cross. The apostolate of the mission improved and the members in the Congregation increased. The Sisters taught catechism and taught in the schools. The Sisters worked with difficulty but were not discouraged from announcing the word of God. In 1928, Bishop Couin wanted the Congregation to have canonical constitutions. He wrote the Constitutions following those of the Lovers of the Cross of Saigon and promulgated them within that year.

In 1939, the Lovers of the Cross elected their general superior for the first time. Sisters Margarita Phloy Wongphim became the first superior and Sister Angela Kham Thongpliu her associate. In November 1940, the Indochina War started; the Thai

government expelled all foreigners from the Kingdom. They closed all Catholic churches and forced the Christians to convert to Buddhism to avoid imprisonment. Hence, foreign priests in the churches in Ubon and the French Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres were dismissed. After the war, in 1942, Bishop Claudius Bayet, the Apostolic Vicar, believed that the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon were able to govern themselves; so he did not invite the St. Paul de Chartres Sisters back to work in the mission (Ibid, pp. 39-40).

After the Second World War, the living conditions of the LCU Sisters improved. In 1960, Fr. Mabou Andre, the Spiritual director of the Congregation wrote the new Constitutions. They were approved on 14 May 1960. In 1961, Bishop Claudius Bayet, Apostolic Vicar of the Diocese of Ubon was summoned twice by the Holy See and by the Council in Vietnam to make a survey of the women with religious vows so that they could be officially and canonically recognized in his diocese. He then tried to find official documents to determine whether the Congregation had been founded canonically but did not find any because the documents had been burned during the Second World War. The lack of evidence and his misconception of the original spirituality from Bishop Lambert de la Motte made him change the title of the Congregation from “The Lovers of the Cross of Ubon” to “The Servants of Mary of Ubon”. “The change of the title and the canonical foundation caused confusion for some members of the Congregation. They did not understand the purpose of the Bishop, which the superior of the Congregation had approved personally but had not asked for the members’ opinions before the change. Although the Congregation had been using the title “The Servants of Mary of Ubon” for a long time, all members felt that they were “Lovers of the Cross” (Ibid, pp. 42-43). The Union of the Lovers of the Cross later arranged for their members to study together the

history and original spirituality with Fr. Robert Costet, MEP, assisting them in searching for important documents and clarification. In 1993, there was a renewal of the Constitutions of the Congregation. In 1996, there was a chapter to draft the Constitutions and the rules. On this occasion, the General Chapter had a consensus to change the name of the Congregation back to “The Lovers of the Cross of Ubon”. This change was approved by Bishop Michael Boonluean Mansap and the formal change has been effective from 17 March 1998. On 30 May 1999, Bishop Michael officially approved the new Constitution (Ibid, pp.47–48). At present, there are 122 Sisters in the Congregation, 11 Novices and 2 Postulants. The LCU Sisters are working in about 24 parishes and in 2 dioceses and in 7 provinces: Ubonratchathani, Amnatcharoen, Yasothon, Mahasarkam, Roi-et, Sisaket, and Nakornratchasima. Some Sisters are missionaries doing pastoral work and assisting the poor in Cambodia since 1991. Since 2003, the various Congregations of the Lovers of the Cross have formed a federation comprising the Lovers of the Cross of Chanthaburi, of Ubon, of Tharae and of Chiangwang, Laos.

Charism and Spirituality of the LCU Sisters

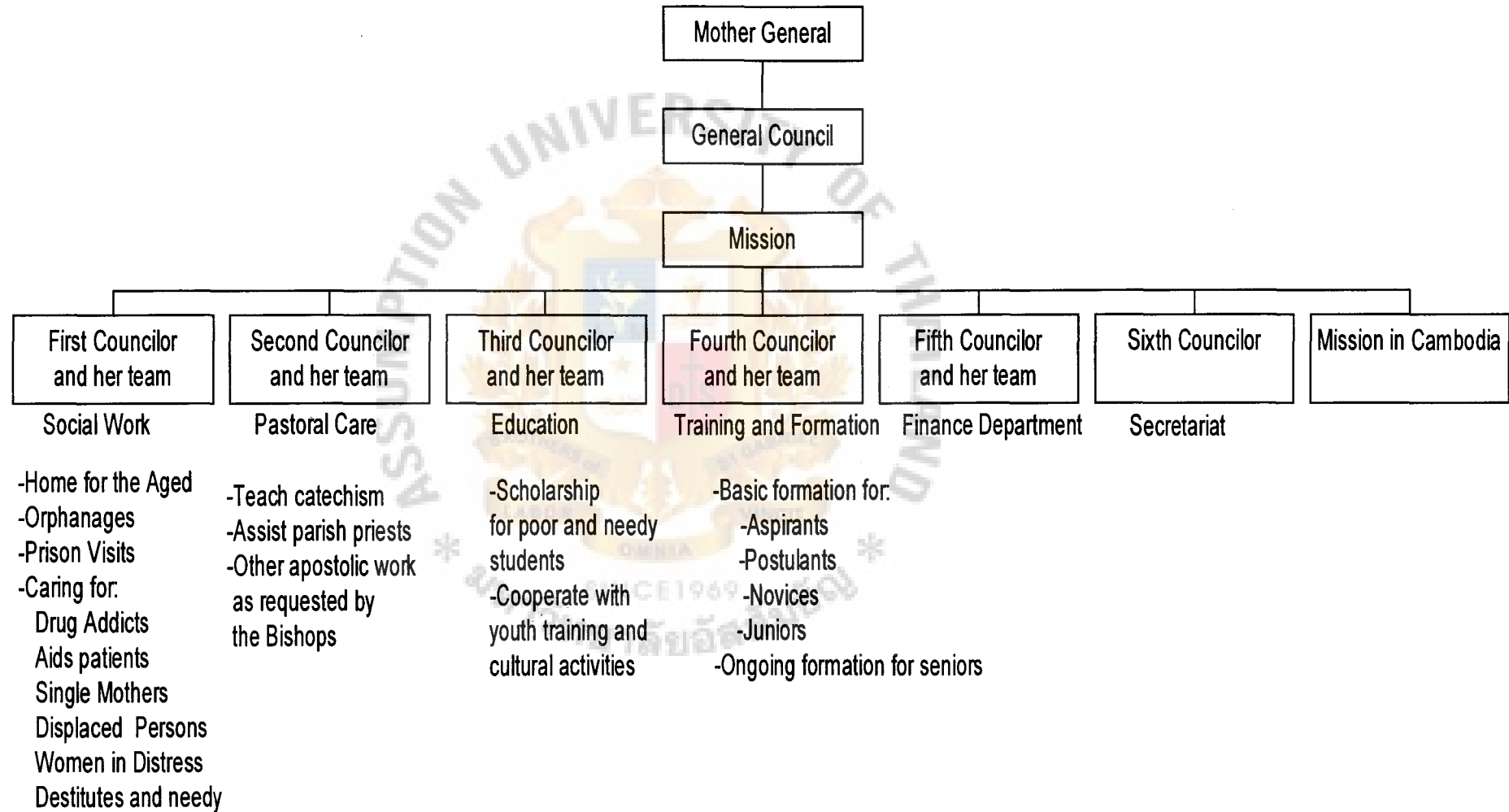
To let the crucified Christ live and work in each and every member by carrying out the mission of the Congregation in accordance with Gospel values rooted in local cultures and in the teaching of the Church.

Mission: Mission is service to the people of God through cooperation with the priests, and formation in seminary, catechism, mission to other countries, education, and social work. The members care for parishioners, the sick, the poor, the elderly, assist troubled

families, uphold the dignity of womanhood, and care for Aids patients, drug addicts, orphans and single mothers. The members strive to live in union with God and be nourished by the Word of God from which the rules of life are derived. Furthermore, the Congregation supports its members to develop themselves in every aspect for the evangelization and the mission of the Congregation (Rule of Life, 1999, p.7).



The Structure of The Congregation of the LCU Sisters



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Sr. Boonmee Khamchalee was born in Srisaket Province, Thailand. After finishing her Primary School at Mandasongthum School, Srisaket Province and her Secondary School at Ave Maria School, Ubonratchatani Province, in 1983 she made her first vows and became a member of the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross of Ubon (LCU).

She received her Bachelor's Degree in Education, majoring in Educational Administration, at Nakornratchasima Teachers College, Thailand, in 1992. She taught for many years in various schools in Amnatcharoen, Nakornratchasima and Ubonratchatani, during which she also held the position of principal of St. Theresa School (Phadung Siln) Nakornratchasima for five years. She was a Novice Mistress and a member of the Formation Team of her Congregation. She joined the M.A. program in Philosophy and Religious Studies at Assumption University of Thailand while she is still in charge of the Junior LCU Sisters.

