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THE GREAT EXODUS

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In December 1961, Father Christopher O'Toole, the Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross, issued a circular letter in which he provided membership statistics to the members of the 1962 General Chapter of the Congregation. O'Toole reported a total of 3,016 Priests and Brothers in the Congregation, including perpetually and temporarily professed and novices, as of that date, the largest membership in the history of the community.

In the years since World War II there had been large classes of novices in all the provinces of North America, and the nine jurisdictions in Canada and the United States accounted for ninety-eight percent of the Congregation's members, including those serving outside of North America.¹ The growth in numbers had permitted the North American provinces to undertake new ministries at home and to open new ministries overseas in Latin America, Haiti, Africa, Italy and India, and to expand the Congregation's personnel in East Bengal. These statistics seemed to give reason to believe that the coming years and decades would see the Congregation of Holy Cross growing ever larger and its expansion beyond North America becoming more significant. But such was not to be.

The Second Vatican Council opened in October 1962, just three months after the General Chapter of that year. Shortly after the Council ended in December 1965, there began a sharp

¹ Christopher J. O'Toole, Circular Letter 26 (December 8, 1961), 20.

reduction in the number of novices and temporary professed.² After the General Chapter of 1968 there began an unprecedented withdrawal of Brothers and Priests in perpetual vows. Between July 1, 1968 and March 1, 1974, 118 perpetually professed Brothers and Priests had died, 324 had left the Congregation and 223 made perpetual vows. In these same years, the total number in perpetual vows declined by 219 or 18.2%. The number of men making temporary profession also declined in these years. This trend peaked in 1970 and 1971, but continued in the following years.³ Between 1968 and 1985, 543 men in perpetual vows withdrew from the community.⁴

There had always been instances of priests and Brothers in perpetual vows leaving religious life, but the number of departures in the twenty years after the Second Vatican Council was a unique phenomenon in the history of the Congregation and the Church.⁵ Looking back in 1978 over the thirteen years since Vatican II, Father Thomas Barrosse, the superior general, observed that the decline in membership because of the departures of perpetually professed religious in the Congregation of Holy Cross was fairly high among international communities of men, but by no means the highest. As Brothers and priests died, fewer men entered the Congregation, and many men withdrew who had often been educated and trained at the community's expense, it became necessary to consolidate or withdraw from some ministries.

Statistics prepared for the 1980 General Chapter showed a further decline of 219 (9.24%) in the number of members in perpetual vows in the years 1974-1980 as 179 had died, 155 men in perpetual vows had departed from the community, and 115 had made perpetual profession in these years.⁶ Statistics published by the superior general in December 1985 indicated that the decline in membership was slowing down. In 1980-1985, 151 men in perpetual vows had died,

² Germain-Marie Lalande, Circular Letter 6 (May 1, 1968), 64-65.

³ Lalande, Circular Letter 14 (April 14, 1974) 65, 68, 73.

⁴ Barrosse, Circular Letter 25 (December 15, 1985), 29-30.

⁵ Thomas O. Barrosse, Circular Letter 10 (December 17, 1978), 4-5;

64 had departed from the community, and 77 had made perpetual profession. The median age of the Congregation in 1985 was fifty-four. At the end of Vatican II in 1965, the Congregation of Holy Cross had numbered 3,058 members including perpetually and temporarily professed and novices.⁷ At the end of 1985, the total membership of perpetually and temporarily professed plus novices in the Congregation was 1,989, a decline of thirty-five percent in the twenty years after 1965.⁸

The North American provinces were particularly affected by the departure of perpetually professed members in 1968-1974. The Eastern Province of Brothers and the Canadian Province of Priests each lost more than nineteen percent of their members in final vows. The Midwest and Indiana provinces lost sixteen and fourteen percent respectively. Since the average age of those departing was between thirty-four and forty, the provinces saw their members' average age rising from the mid-thirties to the mid-forties.⁹ By 1974, the total membership of the Congregation in perpetual and temporary vows had declined by one-fifth (20%) since the opening of the Council in 1962. The decline was mostly confined to the North American provinces with the result that the number of personnel available for new ministries and foundations was curtailed.¹⁰

Although the number of men in perpetual vows who departed in 1986-1998 was less than in the twenty years after the Council, the community continued to become smaller and older as deaths outnumbered the new members joining and the average age of members grew higher. The total number of men in the Congregation, perpetually and temporarily professed plus novices,

⁶ Barrosse, Circular Letter 13 (February 11, 1980), 26-35.

⁷ "Key Events 1950-1968," *Expansion of Government Structures in Holy Cross* (Rome: Congregation of Holy Cross, n.d.), 4.

⁸ Barrosse, Circular Letter 13 (December 15, 1985), 29-30.

⁹ Lalande, Circular Letter 14 (April 14, 1974), 68, 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

would not stabilize until after 2012.¹¹ The losses had been heavier in the Brothers' Society than in the Priests' Society. In 1998, the Canadian Brothers' province had no novices in Canada and the three Brothers' provinces in the United States together had five in that country. The Canadian Priests' province had three novices in Canada, and the three American Priests' provinces had eleven novices in the United States.¹²

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

Since so many men in perpetual vows left in the decade after Vatican II, it is tempting to conclude that the departures must have been because of the Council. This may be true, but while various explanations have been proposed, no clear connection has been demonstrated between the Council and the high rate of departures. Father Thomas Barrosse, elected superior general in 1974, a former novice master, believed that an inadequate understanding of the values and commitments of religious life in Holy Cross underlay the departures of so many men in perpetual vows. In his first term in office as superior general (1974-1980), he devoted a series of circular letters from 1975 to 1979 to an articulation and discussion of these values and commitments.

In his report on the state of the Congregation prepared for the 1980 General Chapter, Father Thomas Barrosse, the superior general, reflected on the changes in the life of the community over the previous fifteen years.¹³ First of all, Barrosse noted, in the Congregation as well as in the Church, much attention had been devoted to the person, to helping religious to develop personally, "that is to grow emotionally and spiritually in order to become more responsible for their own lives and better able to function in increasingly demanding circumstances." While this had positive effects, at times it had unleashed immature and selfish

¹¹ Plante-Morin, "Congregation of Holy Cross – Resource Analysis 2015": 6. Planning Documents, Holy Cross General Archives, Rome.

¹² Grou, Circular Letter 19, (May 1, 1998), 24.

¹³ Barrosse, Circular Letter 10 (December 17, 1978), 4-17.

behavior. People often started with values and then sought structures to express them rather than starting with structures “accepted as enshrining and fostering values which are then appropriated by persons living within the structures.” A number of apostolates once directed by Holy Cross religious were now shared with others with whom the religious must compete to obtain a position. Many religious worked in activities that “we cannot call our own.” Many of them were the only Holy Cross religious involved.

There had been, Barrosse noted, a significant apostolic development in some parts of the Congregation in the awareness of social injustice and an effort to do something about it both in institutions and through the efforts of individuals. But a growing diversity in apostolic involvement had led to the loss of a shared apostolic vision. There had been a continuing dispersion of the membership in an expanding diversity of activities. This trend could be met only by serious apostolic planning “to go wherever the Spirit leads’ to answer ‘the pressing needs of the Church and of society.”

Barrosse observed that there had been a diminishing of the sense of community in the Congregation over the previous fifteen years since the Second Vatican Council.

Until ten or twelve years ago, we all dressed alike, wearing the same religious habit and the same formal street dress, and we followed the same daily, weekly, monthly and annual schedule of prayer life and community “exercises” all over the world. Without realizing it, we were saying something to one another by this common observance: we were communicating to one another that we shared the same religious values.

When the habit was laid aside and the schedule of each group and person was made one’s own responsibility, Barrosse continued, Holy Cross religious stopped communicating to one another that they shared the same religious values, and some wondered whether they did. Community life had previously been highly structured: meals together and a half-hour of community

recreation after supper; local communities gathered in the chapel at various moments during the day to recite formulas from the Congregation's directory of prayers. Silent prayer such as meditation was performed according to a particular method suggested by that same directory with everyone gathered in the chapel at 5:30 a.m. As a community routine, the practice of mental prayer became the responsibility of each one and it fell completely out of the lives of many. Some came to see no reason for daily Mass. Barrosse questioned whether many Holy Cross religious had achieved a real integration between their prayer life and their ministry.

Barrosse found a similar decline in the understanding and appreciation of the traditional vows of religious life: celibate chastity, poverty and obedience. A better appreciation of the sexual dimension of the whole of human life in the preceding years had given rise to a positive understanding of celibacy instead of merely abstaining from marriage and sexual indulgence. But a growing exploitation of eroticism by the popular culture had undermined the value of self-restraint with regard to sexuality. Were religious life and its values, Barrosse asked, appreciated as a challenge to the anti-Christian values of the culture?

"Thirty years ago," Barrosse continued, "Holy Cross was poor," and the common understanding of the vow of poverty was largely juridical. Permission had to be asked for the use of goods with money value and the goods that were used belonged to the community. Then came the affluent consumer society and in North America, at least, the Congregation ceased to be poor. A legalistic approach to religious life was no longer adequate. How were Holy Cross religious going to be recognized in the affluent society and consumerism as men who, in the words of the Constitutions, "like the apostles [have left] all things to follow Christ"?

The vow of obedience and authority had seen the superior's requests as the will of God and accepted that he reached his decisions on his own or with the help of a very few councilors. But,

Barrosse observed, Pope Paul VI and Vatican II insisted that authority should no longer be exercised in that way. Some religious came to feel that no one else should make decisions affecting their lives. In some places in the Congregation, authority structures had largely been dismantled and it was difficult to find someone to serve as local superior. Many seemed to have lost the conviction that they had come to Holy Cross to do the will of God Who had called them, not to do their own will. Dialogue in chapters or in other community meetings or with superiors, he stated, should be focused on how to do the will of God.

Yet another area of decline that Barrosse perceived was the relationship between the two societies in the Congregation and the provinces. The settlement of 1946 had divided Priests and Brothers into autonomous provinces as a means of resolving tensions between them. But Father Moreau's intention, Barrosse contended, had been that the two societies should collaborate on an equal footing, along with the Sisters, in the government of the Congregation and share the same religious life and religious ideal. In the early years immediately following Vatican II, Barrosse observed, many of the provinces tended to turn in on themselves and to lose sight of the needs and situation of the international Holy Cross. Some priests and Brothers nurtured resentment over past hurts they had experienced from members of the other society. While Barrosse professed to see instances of a broader rather than a provincial concern coming about, there was still much to be done, he thought, to make collaboration more of a reality.

Barrosse went on to draw three conclusions from the foregoing observations. First, there existed in the Congregation a great variety of views regarding the expression of the members' religious values. To some extent this reflected the pluralism that had become a trait of the post-conciliar Church. On the other hand, it reflected the fact that the conversion called for by the Council in the renewal of religious life had not been experienced by many members. Secondly,

there had been a loss of religious identity, which is more a matter of experience than of intellectual conviction. This also related to renewal unevenly experienced throughout the Congregation. A third conclusion was that renewal had yet to be experienced by Holy Cross as a community. “In a time like the present – a time of challenge,” Barrosse concluded, “it is with the same sense of being about a task to which we are called by God, that we must promote the renewal of Holy Cross.”¹⁴

While the North American provinces experienced a steady decline in membership in 1968-1998, the slow but steady growth of the Congregation in Asia, Africa and Haiti was changing the balance of membership in the community. Recruitment of Indians to the Congregation had begun only in 1954 and a formation program in India dated back to 1959, but the number of men entering the Congregation grew steadily and quickly. In 1984, the Canadian Priests’ District of India became a province. By the year 1998, there were 136 men in perpetual and temporary vows in the Province of India and thirty-four in the Canadian Brothers’ District of India.¹⁵

In Ghana, where the Brothers began working in November 1957, they had begun accepting African vocations in 1962. Brother Joseph Tsiquaye entered the formation program in 1966 and in 1971 became the first Ghanaian Brother of Holy Cross to profess perpetual vows. By 1998, there were sixteen Ghanaians in vows in the District of West Africa.¹⁶ Recruitment of local vocations in Uganda got under way only in 1980. In the first years, two candidates were sent to India or the United States for their novitiate. A joint novitiate in Uganda for priests and Brothers was opened in 1984 and thereafter there was a steady stream of men professing

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵ Grou, Circular Letter 19 (May 1, 1998), 24.

¹⁶ Ibid., 26; “Where the Lord Has Called and Lead (sic) Holy Cross Over the Years,” *The Congregation of Holy Cross in West Africa: Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Arrival of Holy Cross in Ghana* (n.p. 1997), 9.

temporary vows. In 1990, Fulgens Katende was the first Ugandan to make perpetual vows. By 1998 there were forty-eight men in vows.¹⁷

Holy Cross religious from Canada began working in Haiti in 1944 and a minor seminary with seven aspirants was opened in 1949. In that same year, two Haitian postulants entered the novitiate in Montreal. One of them, Pollux Byas, professed perpetual vows in 1953 and in 1955 was the first Haitian ordained as a Holy Cross priest. A novitiate was opened in Cap Haïtien, Haiti, in 1953. Recruitment and professions were somewhat sporadic, but the novitiate was reopened in 1975. By 1998 there were thirty-two Haitians in perpetual vows and another seventeen in temporary vows.¹⁸

In Bangladesh, the oldest of the Congregation's missions outside of North America, there were only a very few local vocations until after the civil war between East and West Pakistan in 1971 that resulted in Bangladesh independence in December 1971. In 1972, Patrick D'Rozario, later to become the Cardinal Archbishop of Dhaka, was the first of many Bangladeshis ordained after independence. In 1979, Benedict Rozario was the first Brother to profess perpetual vows in the new nation of Bangladesh. On a visit to the country in November 1986, Pope John Paul II ordained seven Holy Cross priests. By 1998, there were fifty-nine men in perpetual vows and another forty in temporary vows.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jim Nichols, CSC, *Competence to See and Courage to Act: Celebrating 50 Years of Holy Cross Ministry in East Africa* (n.p., 2008?), 16-17.

¹⁸ "L'Histoire de Sainte-Croix en Haïti," CSCG 610.15 Religio; Louis Badeaux, CSC, "Itinerary of the first Haitian Holy Cross Priest: Pollux Byas, 1928-1988," *CSC Internazionale* (Rome), April 1993: 10-11; Claude Grou, CSC, C.L. No. 19, May 1, 1998: 26.

¹⁹ Richard Timm, CSC, *150 Years of Holy Cross in Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Congregation of Holy Cross, 2003), 69-70.

CONCLUSION

In 1962, when Vatican II opened, ninety-eight percent of the 2,283 Holy Cross religious in perpetual vows had been members of one or other of the North American provinces. By 1998, eighty-nine percent of the 1,491 men in perpetual vows belonged to the North American provinces. By 1998, members in vows plus novices numbered 1,638, a decline of forty-six percent since the close of the Second Vatican Council.²⁰

In the twenty-first century, the balance would continue to shift. By 2015, only fifty-eight percent of the 1,142 Holy Cross priests and Brothers in perpetual vows belonged to the North American provinces.²¹ By the end of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the Congregation of Holy Cross looked much different than it had in the middle of the twentieth century.

²⁰ Claude Grou, Circular Letter 19 (May 1, 1998), 24.

²¹ Plante-Morin, "Congregation of Holy Cross – Resource Analysis 2015": 4-9. Planning documents, Holy Cross General Archives, Rome.