



## ORDINE DEGLI AGOSTINIANI SCALZI

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Prot. Reg. V; fol. 218/02

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE ORDER.

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### **Subject: What is behind the requests for *Absentia a domo*, for Exclaustration or the abandonment of our Order.**

It is interesting to try to analyze the difficulties declared by the religious in the requests for *Absentia a domo*, for Exclaustration or the abandonment of the religious community and the priestly ministry, in order to grasp the roots, sometimes not expressed, which motivate them, make an accurate evaluation and draw from them indications on how to prevent them and start in them with a good solution.

- a) Some situations are related to the difficulty that religious encounter in weaving and maintaining serene and peaceful human relationships with the confreres. It is quite evident, in some of them, the inability to dialogue, to confront, to tolerate, to be patient, to excuse and forgive the other. The three little words that constitute the secret of a healthy and pleasant human coexistence are too little heard in the community: “please”, “sorry”, “thank you”. Community life is felt, in some cases, more like a burden than a wealth, giving greater weight to its needs than to its benefits. We prefer to avoid rather than seek moments of encounter. Trying to shorten the time spent at the table are symptomatic; not trying to start a conversation; keeping the TV or cell phone on. It is strange: in almost all communities people pray together, but informal moments of leisure or recreation have almost disappeared. Leaving out the celebration of the Conventual Chapters is only the tip of the iceberg and is perhaps also a symptom of interpersonal discomfort or demotivation to believe in the value of this important tool of common life.
- b) Many people have a strong desire to manage their lives independently, in all its aspects, starting with the financial one. There is a badly hidden thirst for independence. The community is seen as a hood that inhibits and mortifies. We reach the point of no longer being transparent, we become slippery and hypocritical, so that sometimes we don't communicate the exits from the community, we don't realize the administration of money; we are not interested in the life and activities of others. More than serving, one uses the community, rarely contributing anything. It is believed that without ties to a religious community, things would be simpler, there would be no problems.
- c) In requests for *Absentia a domo*, the desire to help family members is often indicated as motivation. In most cases, the request for help hardly comes from the family or from a real need; it is not difficult to perceive that the question hides other inconveniences, or problems that one is unable to face and solve. More than the need for the family, it is the religious who feels the need to get out of an environment that has become too narrow. The family is usually not aware of the situation and would not be happy to see the religious and/or priest son leave consecrated life and ministry because of them. This reveals, at best, a lack of clarity about the consequences that derive from perpetual consecration, serious gaps in one's own formation, while in other cases a true duplicity of intentions.
- d) It makes us think that for many Exclaustration was requested without serious and consistent reasons, most of the time affirming that they had thought and prayed a lot before making the decision. In reality, the request, not infrequently, hides an egocentric vision of

life and the personal difficulties of going out of oneself to put oneself at the service of the community or to be accompanied in a moment of crisis. It is natural to ask: what kind of pastoral service can these religious priests carry out in a Diocese? How will they be able to carry out an authentically pastoral service, called to self-denial, to forget about themselves, to worry and care for the people of God entrusted to them, even to the gift of life?

- e) Normally the crisis is managed autonomously and decisions are almost always unilateral. When the crisis settles, one is unable to look around. Often the agreements with the Bishops are made under the table, in advance and the superiors are put before the fait accompli. The Bishops, on their part, very rarely come into contact with Superiors. It is surprising that religious with a strong individuality, incapable of sharing both materially and personally, often reluctant to make themselves available to the community, careful not to do more than the minimum due are attracted to diocesan life. They do not seem motivated by pastoral zeal for Christian communities, rather by the desire to enjoy greater freedom to lead a more independent lifestyle, which often turns out to be a great illusion.
- f) Some, expressly or implicitly, indicate as a reason for the request for Exclaustration the fact that they were not valued in the Order. They do not realize that the search for valorization not accompanied by a testimony of disinterested dedication is proof of an inner conflict, because happiness is placed in filling a specific office or in a title received, rather than in serving. It shows a pernicious dependence on praise, on being at the center of attention, on emerging at all costs. Our charism certainly goes against the grain: Joyfully serving the Most High in the spirit of humility; “When you have done all you have to do, say: we are useless servants” (Lk 17:10). The contradiction between the lemma of the charism and the lament of a lack of recognition and appreciation suggests a superficial knowledge of the central nucleus of consecrated life and of our specific spirituality. Training gap? But how were the approximately ten years of formation, of which at least five as professed, lived? Is the impact with a concrete community (which begins already in the year of discernment) really capable of undermining all the certainties that have matured? Wouldn't it rather be superficiality or short-sightedness that places its security in personal ideals and projects? Or did the lack of frustration and provocation during formation give birth to immature adults who may prefer to point the finger at their superiors rather than face the fatigue of personal change?
- g) The abandonment of the common life and the priestly ministry is often the result of a growing emotional and affective discomfort, pushing some to live a double life, carrying on and for a long-time affective relationships kept secret. Rarely in these cases has we seen asking for help as well as a certain carelessness on the part of the confreres in facing such difficulties. However, in many situations it was evident the lack of prudence and the inability to manage normal difficulties for those who have made the choice of consecrated and celibate life.
- h) It is worrying that some religious developed serious addictions to alcoholic substances and, more rarely, also to drugs during the first years of priesthood, as well as the symptoms of serious psychological disorders that required specialized treatments and stays in specialized centers. . Here too it must be noted that the use of psychotherapy is addressed as a remedy to stem the most obvious aspects of the crisis, while it could be used as an instrument of self-knowledge even in the apparent absence of serious and urgent problems. Certainly, it is a support and not a solution. Unfortunately, psychological accompaniment without a spiritual path that goes hand in hand cannot be effective also because it risks cutting out the community, an essential element in taking charge of the whole situation.
- i) Without doubt, all this presents gaps in formation regarding the value and obligations deriving from consecration, despite the years of study and formation received. The fact that most of the problems emerge during the first ten years of the priesthood suggests that the time of initial formation is experienced as a protected situation. Probably it is not

possible to sufficiently undermine the deep motivations, to root the option of one's consecration, to externalize the difficulties that arise, starting a work on oneself that will make one's affectivity mature.


In the same way it is right to consider that other religious who have followed the same path of maturation and have had the same formators have remained faithful to their consecration. So, there is always a strong personal connotation in the way of experiencing formation, of receiving the stimuli received and of managing one's conflicts. It is proven that whoever does not open up to dialogue and confrontation with formators is doomed to failure, while whoever is capable of opening his heart has many chances of emerging matured from the normal crises of the vocational journey.

What has been said obviously happens more frequently in the younger Provinces. It must be recognized for honesty that the Province of Brazil and that of the Philippines have been holding for years many meetings for formators, who have also been offered short and long-term courses as a necessary aid to their delicate office.


Let us not forget what Card. João Bráz DE AVIZ, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, stressed in the address addressed to Pope Francis at the end of the Eucharistic celebration on February 2, 2020: that, even if most of the crises and defections occur in the first years of priesthood or of perpetual profession, "now they reach all ages".

Rome, September 21, 2020,

Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist.

  
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Secretary General



  
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