

CHAPTER FOUR

MSFS CONSTITUTIONS AND GENERAL DIRECTORY

PART I

A DEEP LOOK INTO THE CONSTITUTIONS

Introduction

We will now focus our attention on the Constitutions of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales (MSFS), also known as the Fransalians.¹ It is more of a Reflection, a Meditation on the Constitutions. It is a humble attempt to ponder the depths and heights of our Constitutions.

As we dwell a little close with our Constitutions, the first emotion and sentiment that arouses may be wonder and marvel at its richness. Thus this reflection also intends to increase our appreciation and love for our Constitutions. Accordingly, this reflection-paper is a modest effort to deepen our grasp of it, assimilate its spirit and strengthen our commitment to follow it. So the predominant purpose of our reflection-paper is to “Rediscover and Recapture” the inadequately explored and lived spirit of our Constitutions so that we can reinvigorate ourselves to a fuller reliving of it.

Since our whole focus is on the Constitutions, this chapter will be a blend of “What it is?” and “What comes from what it is?” In other words, it will highlight the spirit and teaching of the Constitutions. This will include also some direct references from the Constitutions. So we will not hesitate to “reproduce” the thoughts of the Constitutions. However, we do not stop there. We also try to draw insights from these propositions, in the form of implications and corollaries. We will also explicate the context, the challenges, the need and remedial measures.²

1.1 What is Constitutions?³

1.1.1 Constitutions – More than a Body of Rules!

¹We need to be clear, at the outset itself, that it is not going to be a Research Paper on the Constitutions. It is also not a Summary or Synthesis. It is also not a Commentary on it. However, we do not exclude some elements of all these aspects. This Paper being a Reflective Unfolder, for sure contains something of a scientific coherence, synthesis, summary and commentary.

²A very important note is that all the references to the MSFS Constitutions are mentioned in the main body of the article itself. They are not given underneath as the footnotes proper. The reason is simple. Since the whole reflection is on the Constitutions, the references are by and large from the Constitutions and they are abundant. So, immediate references in the main body would facilitate easy and quick reading. In these references, the first number after the # indicates the number of the article in the constitutions and the second number indicates the page number.

³The term ‘Constitutions’ is considered as a singular noun because it is taken in its collective sense as referring to a body or collection of multiple constitutions or rules. Let us then bear in mind that the term ‘constitutions’ does not refer to individual constitutions.

The very term ‘constitutions’ connotes a sense of something formal, legal and juridical. It is something binding and obligatory. Accordingly, Constitutions is regarded as a rule-book, a codex of norms and principles, the body of directives that are to be adhered to. The breach of them incurs sanctions in the form of diverse measures that may be probative, punitive, retributive or restitutive, all intended to be remedial and transformative.

Thus often Constitutions is sought for clarity and direction and also for the power of authorization and convinceability of administrative acts and measures. All this is right. But this “legalistic vestige” alone does not do full justice to its true nature and identity. Constitutions is holistic and integral. It pertains to the whole life and person. Its direction and thrust are not only for administrative clarity and “enforceable” competence and authority. Its purpose is not only to strengthen the hands of administration through clarity and firmness. Rather, it is to help us to live a life of integration and integrity.

Constitutions is not only a rule of life in the sense of prescribing rules that regulate life, but a way of life that rules our life. The Constitutions constitutes a religious congregation by articulating in its rules of life that articulate its core identity and specific mission. In that way, the constitutions is the heart and soul of a congregation. It also becomes the measuring rod by which a member’s life is assessed.

And every constitutions will be inviolably soaked into the Word of God and will be in conformity with the spirit and direction of the Canon Law, the CCC (Catechism of the Catholic Church) and the Code of Ethics. Therefore it is not presumptuous or overstretching to say that Constitutions is the Rule of life which is founded on the Word of God, in tune with the spirituality of the holy Patron and in the footsteps of the inspired Founder. This is further corroborated and bequeathed by a rich heritage and well-lived tradition and testified by all the present members in fidelity and fervour. Our Founder’s own words testify to the pre-eminence of the Constitutions as he observes: “How important are our Rules! It’s the password (to heaven)! Our rampart, our citadel, our arsenal (during our journey)”⁴

1.1.2 Our whole concern and Ultimate Purpose

Seen in this perspective, our whole purpose will be marked by certain mental features such as fidelity, clarity, lucidity, simplicity, practicability and propriety. Accordingly, we can speak of a fourfold task concerning the Constitutions: Studying and getting familiarized with the text; Imbibing and deepening the spirit; Drawing practical implications and directives in the light of the text; and Fostering and leading a life in conformity with the spirit of it. In fact, this can also be said to be the “proximate” purpose. The ultimate purpose is to live as authentic disciples of Christ and effective Fransalians.

1.2 A brief look at the Evolution of the MSFS Constitutions

1.2.1 The Emergence of the Formal Constitutions

Though the Congregation received its ecclesiastical approval on 24 October 1838, the approval of its constitutions took time and was rather a prolonged and tedious process. Earnest efforts already began right from 1843. But it was only in August 1889 that the text of the MSFS Constitutions was duly approved by

⁴Quoted in Study Paper 4 in *Study Papers and Collated Reports*, presented at Extraordinary General Chapter, Nov 08-14, 2022 of Missionaries of St Francis de Sales (Pune: Fransalian Seminary, 2022), 93.

the SC (Sacred Congregation) for Religious and confirmed by the Holy Father. The new Constitutions came into force from the date of the annual retreat of 1890. This brought to a happy end a long 47 years of ordeal.⁵

1.2.2 Progressive Revisions of the Constitutions

The Constitutions was revised, and reprinted by Fr. Jules Comerson, Superior General in 1936 (with translations in French and English), leaning toward the centenary of the Congregation. The Extra-Ordinary General Chapter of 1968 revised the text of the MSFS Constitutions incorporating the ecclesiastical directives into the Constitutions. It came into force on 23 February 1969. The successive General Chapters of 1971, and 1977 continued to concern themselves with the remarks and desiderata of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. The General Chapter of 1983 finalized and approved the definitive text for submission for the approval of the Holy See. On 24th October 1984, The Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes, in the name of the Holy Father, approved our Revised Constitutions. The General Chapter of 2001 mandated a further revision of the Constitutions to respond to the Call of the Church at the entry into the New Millennium. The task of drafting the revision was entrusted to a committee consisting of Fr Thomas Kalariparambil (convenor), Fr Jacob Parappally, and Fr Thomas Aerathedam. The prepared draft document was studied, corrected and complemented through the active participation of all the members of the congregation at the individual, apostolic community, and province levels. An Extraordinary General Chapter was convoked in 2003 specifically for the purpose of studying and approving the final draft of the constitutions. The final draft was submitted to the Holy See for approval. The Holy Father through the Congregation of Religious Life and Apostolic Societies granted the approval on 24th January 2006. With the XVIII General Chapter in May 2007, this revised MSFS Constitutions and General Directory came into force.⁶

1.3 The Dynamics of the Unfolding of the Constitutions: Consecration for Mission

The whole journey of our Constitutions can be said to be steered with a central focus on “Consecration for Mission”. Our vocation is consecration and this consecration is meant for and geared to mission. These two are not opposites or exclusive dialectics. They are also not sequential, in the sense of one coming after another. They are rather “cumulative”, that is one includes the other, one supports the other, and one leads to the other. Thus this consecration for mission is consecrated mission or missionary consecration. These are two aspects of the one reality of fidelity to the Lord through the Constitutions. These can signify the two fundamental human dimensions of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ respectively.

Accordingly, Prologue and Chapter 1 “clarify” our vocation is consecration. Chapter 2 “actualizes and concretizes” our mission as sharing in the mission of Christ. Chapter 3 “unfolds, blossoms and authenticates” consecration by virtues and vows. Chapter 4 “roots and sustains” consecration in communion that is both ‘spiritual’, in prayer and surrender; and ‘fraternal’, in community life and solidarity with others. Chapter 5 “grooms and cultivates” consecration in formation. Chapter 6 and the rest “animate and channelize” consecration by authority and authorization through animating and serving leadership.

1.3.1. Consecration – An Integral Perspective

Today both consecration and mission come under heavy criticism from some circles. There is a strong disgruntlement. In this context, it is better that we remind ourselves of their meaning and value. Four aspects can be highlighted:

⁵cf Francis Moget, *Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales* (SFS Publications: Bangalore, 1988), 162.

⁶cf Reported in *Study Papers & Collated Reports*, EGC, 93-94.

1.3.1.1 Consecration means to be set apart

By the fact of consecration, one is specially chosen, separated from the rest of the fold, and is made to be different. He or she no more belongs to the same level or standards, and operates no more restricted to the same structures. This idea of 'being set apart' as consecrated is very prevalent all through the pages of the history of salvation. In the Old Testament, God Yahweh sets aside the Israel from the rest of the nations and they become different and differentiated people by their ways, standards, customs and by their way of life. In the New Testament, Jesus chooses the Twelve, and differentiates them from the rest, by the way, and quality of life with him and for him.

It is through this sense of 'difference' from others that the idea of sanctity emerges very strongly. God's chosen people must show their difference from others through their life of holiness. Those who are set apart by God must deeply belong to Him and distinguish themselves from others by constantly standing before Him "holy and blameless" (Eph 1. 4).

1.3.1.2 Consecration means to be Owned, Possessed by God

A consecrated person becomes totally God's own. There is nothing retained or reserved. He becomes God's own propriety and possession. God has absolute rights over the person. He allows his life to be fully controlled by God. God reigns over his life. Thus there is a sense of total belongingness and total surrender.

1.3.1.3 Consecration implies being entirely Loyal and Committed to God's work

A consecrated person is always faithful to the affairs of God. His sole intention and concern is doing God's will. In an unswerving and relentless spirit of dedication, he throws his whole lot into the service of God's kingdom. He sets himself constantly, perseveringly, diligently and joyfully upon fulfilling the tasks of God, however difficult and demanding they be.

1.3.1.4 Consecration means to bear Witness to the Lord

A consecrated person constantly strives to be a Living Testimony to the person and life of the Lord, by word and example. A good tree is known by its good fruits, In the same way, a genuinely consecrated person shows the truth of his consecration, not by mere externals like the titles or attire or the type of activities or status of the positions but by a witnessing life.

1.3.2 Mission – An Integral Perspective

Mission essentially is a threefold fidelity: to the very nature of the Church, as Vatican II clearly affirms that the Church is missionary by its very nature; to the mission of Christ who was primarily a missionary par excellence; and to the very essence and core of our beloved Congregation of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales which is essentially missionary (cf Const # 13: 12; also Const # 4: 8).

Mission implies a fundamental duty. The "spirit" of the mission is more important than the mere place, though the place of the mission cannot be undermined. We make this observation because we know that place alone does not guarantee mission as at times one may be in a mission place but may not have the missionary spirit. Now some of the main components of the spirit of mission are readiness, openness, adventure with a spirit of exploration and expedition, courage to face challenges and risks, sacrifice to cope with discomfort and deprivation, adjustment, adaptation and flexibility, diligence and dedication, perseverance and joy.

1.4 Consecration for Mission in and through Vision, Charism and Ministries

1.4.1 Vision

Vision primarily refers to the vision of the Founder. It is that on the basis of how he understood Christ's mission and in response to the needs and challenges of his context. Vision can be amplified, clarified and qualified, depending on the thrust given in Christ's mission and the contexts. Every congregation has to constantly reflect on its vision so that it remains relevant and leads to an effective mission.

Concerning Vision, what is refreshing and deepening is, two aspects or significations are outlined: one is, the Vision of the Father Himself from the foundations of the world. The other is the Vision of the Founder from the foundation of the Congregation.

1.4.1.1 Foundational Vision of the Father

It is the vision of the Father from the foundation of the world (cf Const # 1: 7). The vision of the Father refers to that original design and choice of the Father for us to be "holy and blameless" before Him, that eternal destination to "be like His Son, Jesus Christ, and to be His sons through His Son, Jesus Christ". (Eph 1. 4, 6).

This has various implications. It calls us to live in communion with the Father, to follow His Son, to resemble His Son, to bear witness to him, and to continue the same mission of proclaiming and realizing the Good news of salvation that is liberation and wholeness (cf Const # 11: 11), to spread God's reign (cf Const # 13: 12), to be loyal members of the church, and to experience and enjoy the fullness of life.

1.4.1.2 Foundational Vision of the Founder

It is the vision of the Founder from the foundation of the congregation, that original insight of the Founder. This has profound implications. It summons a twofold passion for God and humanity and a profound communion with God. It calls for a radical consciousness of divinity as liberated and transformed humanity. It recognizes that humanity is constantly disfigured by various forms of sin such as false doctrines, tepid faith and discriminations of various sorts (cf Const # 5: 9)). It strives to transfigure such a disfigured face by the total availability of the person as well as all the energies and resources in a more effective mission. Thereby missionaries become "all things to all" and avail all means like preaching, writing and personal encounters (cf # Const 6: 9; 13: 12). It is also being endowed with the virtues of Christ after the example of St Francis de Sales, like patient and gentle charity, total surrender, joyful holiness, profound humility, unfailing optimism and unflinching zeal (cf Const # 8: 10).

1.4.2 Charism

Charism is the unique way in which the vision is concretized.⁷ It is how the Founder's vision conforms with the Vision of the Father. It indicates how he is being empowered by and attuned to the Spirit in concretizing the Vision in and through the Congregation.

It is the distinguishing mark through (living) the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales. (cf Const # 7: 9). Bishop Joseph Rey offers us an insight into how this Charism must unfold itself. He attests: "Yours is a

⁷However, we do not elaborate here on Charism because it is exclusively and extensively dealt with in the 3rd Article/Chapter of this Source Book. Its understanding also received better clarity and amplification, launching from that in the Constitutions.

triple task: study St Francis de Sales, imitate his virtues, form your method of guiding people on his: full of gentleness to sinners.” (Const # 9: 10). Thanks to the constant spirit of study and reflection, we have now a more clear and amplified understanding of our Charism. “The Charism of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales is to continue the mission of Christ and His Church by living the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales in a religious community of missionaries, as lived and envisioned by our Founder” (Const # 7: 9, endorsed in EGC 2022).

1.4.3 Ministries

Ministries (cf Const # 13: 12) or Apostolates are the responsive ways or aspects or specifications of the mission of Christ. They are the original focuses and prioritizations of the Founder in concretizing the charism in our Christic mission. They are threefold, namely the Renewal of Christian life (Pastoral care), Implanting Christian presence (Pioneering), and Education of the Young (Integral formation) (cf Const # d: 3). They are the specific ways in which the missionary aspects are carried out and actualized: parish/pastoral ministry, oversees/pioneering and education ministry.

In sum, the mission of the congregation can be understood as the blend of vision + charism + ministries. Thus, this summons us to be genuinely and deeply inculturated, to be sensitive and in solidarity with the suffering humanity (cf Const # 11: 11). Thereby we make a self-gift on behalf of all especially the poor, oppressed and the needy and thus serve the Lord. (cf Const # 15: 13).

This then brings us to a little focused reflection on Mission.

1.5. Our Mission as Sharing the Mission of Christ

1.5.1. Called to be Missionaries

The Constitutions all through its pages makes it abundantly clear that our vocation is consecration for the mission. We are called to be missionaries in the mould of Christ who is the first and the greatest missionary and the leader in every mission. (cf Const # 4: 8; # 12: 11). We can never rest as missionaries. We are unceasingly urged to be totally committed to Christ by carrying the missionary task (cf Const # f: 3; # g: 4; # i: 5; # 17: 14; # 21: 16). In fact, the supreme norm of our religious life is following Christ (cf Const # 12: 11) and fidelity to religious commitment is seen in total availability for the mission of the Lord (cf Const # 21: 16).

1.5.2 What is this Mission?

Our mission is not anything self-created or extraneous to our vocation. It is nothing but the sharing and continuation of the same mission of the Lord. (cf Const # 4: 8; # 19: 15). Now what is this mission? What are some of its main components? It is to bring liberation and wholeness to the whole of humanity and the whole of creation, proclaim boldly God’s will to save all and bring to the knowledge of the truth, announce the Good News to all the humans, and proclaim the Father’s unconditional love for all without any discrimination. (cf Const # 12: 11-12; # 1: 7; # e: 3; # 19: 15; # 20: 16).

1.5.3 How to realize this Mission of the Lord?

Then, how to concretize and realize this mission of the Lord that has now become ours? Broadly we can speak of two ways of accomplishing this mission. One is, following Jesus. Second is, following the call of our Charism and spirit of the congregation. Following Jesus implies imitating his example and bearing witness to his life and mission by service and not domination, by docility to God’s will always and everywhere and by a commitment to build a just society (cf Const # 31: 20; # 20: 16; 26: 18).

Following Charism would imply following first and foremost the missionary dynamism of the Patron and the Founder. This would further imply following the three apostolates as unfolding the charism, as established by the Founder. The three original apostolates, namely the Renewal of Christian life, Overseas and Pioneering Evangelization and Education and Formation, especially of the Young would correspond respectively to three integral aspects of the whole missionary dynamism. They are Pastoral care that is nourishing and sustaining; Mission proper that is pioneering and implanting; and Education that is empowering and flourishing. Summarily, they would comprise a commitment to - an integrative education, fraternal communion in community life, a transformative formation, a faithful and edifying vowed life, bearing abundant fruits in different traditional as well as innovative ministries, living an authentic, credible and effective life of witness and being servant-leaders.

1.6 Consecration for Mission through Vows

1.6.1 Vows and Virtues: Co-terminous

Virtues and Vows are not two totally independent and isolated entities that are mutually exclusive. The practice of vows presupposes as well as includes the practice of virtues. Vows are nothing but the religious and juridical vestige of virtues. The more perfect one is in virtue, the more perfect will he be in the vows. Virtues accompany and enhance the practice of vows.

So in this context, we need to be aware of the virtues of St Francis de Sales. We need to highlight some of them, like his charity, gentleness, optimism and joyful surrender to God's will (cf Const # 8: 10). We bear in mind the direction of St Francis de Sales in the selection of virtues. We must consciously avoid the temptation toward big or popular virtues like fortitude, asceticism, and martyrdom that may draw immediate attention and recognition and bring at times instant gratification and a kind of shallow popularity.

Instead, we must constantly try to practise "little virtues" like patience, humility, gentleness, simplicity and optimism. These may not attract much attention and go often unnoticed being taken for granted and casually. The practice of little virtues permeates all of them with the "modesty" of humility and adds "splendour" to them.⁸

1.6.2 Vows: Means and Signs of Religious Consecration

Vows perfectly fit into our central focus of consecration for mission. They are the ways and means by which we live and foster our consecration by God and to God for His mission. By the same token, they are also the signs and expressions by which we manifest and testify to our consecration for mission. (cf Const # 47: 27; 49: 27).

1.6.3 Vows: Deepening of Baptismal Consecration

Vows as ingredients of religious consecration are not exclusively different from our baptismal consecration. Our religious consecration is in fact the deepening, blossoming and full flowering of the baptismal consecration (cf Const # 19: 15; # 45: 25-26; # 46: 26).

1.6.4 Vows: Radical Imitation of Christ

Through the vows, we radically imitate and follow Christ, chaste, poor and obedient. In and through the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, we identify ourselves with Christ,

⁸St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. & ed., Antony Mookenthottam, Armind Nazareth and Antony Kolenchery (Bangalore: S.F.S. Publications, 2012), 137-144.

the chaste, the poor and the obedient. As chaste, Christ loved God unconditionally with intense passion and others with immense charity. As poor, he was totally detached and dispossessed, with God as his greatest treasure. As obedient, he was totally and always surrendered to God's will. Like him, we surrender ourselves totally to God and the Father's will. We consecrate our whole life joyfully and with an undivided heart to the service of God and His Kingdom (cf Const # 45: 26; # 49: 27; # 16: 14).

1.6.5 Vows: Participation in the Trinitarian Communion and Mission

We enter more fully into the Trinitarian communion and mission through the vows. We share radically the Father's mission entrusted to Jesus Christ and His Church, consolidated and accomplished through the Holy Spirit in the concrete apostolic activities. Therein we become partakers of Christ's own consecration and mission and thus share in the fullness of life in God (cf Jn 1. 16; 10. 10; Const # 44: 25; # 46: 26; # 47: 27).

1.6.6 Vows: Noble Ways of Freedom

Vows are not curtailments or infringements of freedom. They do not take away or reduce freedom. On the contrary, they are liberating experiences and means. They make us "inwardly free" from all undue craving and attachment to material possessions, persons and self-gains. They "free our hearts from all those obstacles, which could hinder us in the fervour of charity, in the perfection of divine worship, and in the total availability for the Mission of the Church" (Const # 48: 27; cf Const # 57: 31; # 62: 33; # 51: 28).

1.6.7 Vows: both Gift and Task

Every vow is a gift of God, freely and generously given. In His benevolence, God has freely bestowed on us these gifts. These are not our merits or credits. As gifts, they are very sacred and precious. But they are also tasks. They carry with them a profound sense of responsibility and dutifulness. They place upon us the task of Christ's mission for the Kingdom. Thus, no vow is self-confined but "missionary" by its very nature and purpose. As a gift, the vows consecrate us to God wholeheartedly and with single-minded devotion. As a task, they commit us unreservedly and with unflinching zeal to the cause of the Kingdom of God (cf Const # 50: 28; # 58: 32; # 59: 32).

1.6.8 Vows: Triple principles of Focus, Detachment and Commitment

In every vow, there is a singular focus on the Lord, detachment from the world and all that is contrary and not-befitting to our consecration and mission, and a total commitment to God's kingdom and mission. The practice of the vows gets endangered when there are distractions and deviations that defocus our attention from the Lord, when there are undue attachments either to things or persons as well, and when there are other unworthy and cheap commitments and pursuits (cf Const # 51: 28; # 52: 29; # 55: 30; # 57: 31).

1.6.9 Vows: Eminent Ways of Loving God

Every vow testifies to a love for God that surpasses all the other loves, be it love for things or persons or self and self-interests. In the vow of chastity, there is "love for God with an undivided heart and to love everyone with Christ's own love" (Const # 51: 29). In the vow of poverty, there is love for the Lord as our greatest treasure and possession (cf Const # 57: 31). In the vow of obedience, we love the Lord as our supreme master. His will becomes the binding and guiding norm for our life. Surrender to his will becomes the source of our greatest freedom (cf Const # 68: 36). "There is but one love at work in them that urges us

to go forward with courage and confidence” (Const # 78: 40). Vows visibly show that we “do everything out of love and nothing from compulsion.”⁹

1.6.10 Vows: Not private affairs but Personal, Collective and Missionary

Vows are deeply personal, in the sense that they call for a sense of personal responsibility and commitment. Each religious by his religious consecration through the vows ought to be accountable and faithful. However, Vows are not merely individual concerns. They also essentially carry community and missionary aspects. They place upon us certain obligations toward the communities, be it the local, the province or the congregation, and also toward our mission and the people with and whom for whom we work (cf Const # 61: 33; # 70: 37). In fact, all the vows are intended and oriented to the realization of the kingdom, in solidarity with others, especially the poor and the needy, that is all those who stand in need of God’s love, comfort and justice.

1.6.11 Vows: Authentic Witnesses to the World

Vows are highly relevant even now in our times which try to undervalue the worth of the vows. They make us “become witness to the Gospel values and a counter-witness to the worldly values” (Const # 48: 27). Through them, we “become a living witness to the world that God alone suffices” (Const # 49: 27).

1.6.12 The greatest Rationale for vows: “God alone suffices”

Vows are accepted and practised on the basis of the sole reason that God alone suffices (cf Const # 49: 27; # 65: 34; # 69: 36). The vow of chastity is nothing but the conviction and practice that God alone suffices as He is my greatest lover and partner, and pure and healthy relationships are supports for positive satisfaction. Therefore, I do not seek any deviated and unhealthy relationships or physical gratifications. The vow of poverty is nothing but the conviction and practice that God alone suffices as He is my greatest wealth and spiritual riches are my greatest riches. Therefore, I am not carried away by lust for money and am not attached to material abundance. The vow of obedience is nothing but the conviction and practice that God alone suffices as He is my supreme Master and Lord and His will is my highest norm, and surrender to his will is my greatest freedom and fulfillment. Therefore, I am not led by self-will, self-interests and unbridled autonomy.

1.7 Mission: Grounded on Community Life

1.7.1 Community life: Vital

Religious life is a call to live our consecration for mission in and through community life. It is the context where our religious consecration is lived, from where our apostolic activity flows out, and which fulfils our mission (cf Const # 79: 41; # 46: 26). Community is the fertile soil which nurtures fraternal communion (cf Const # 80: 41; # 101: 49), a life of “one heart and one soul” (Acts 4.32). “This serves as the wellspring of our personal growth and maturation” (Const # 46: 26). “It is a sign of the Kingdom of God” (Const # 101: 48).

1.7.2 Community life: Essentially Trinitarian

“The Triune God is the source, model and reference point of our religious communities” (Const # 79: 41). What marks the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is their absolute oneness and absolute love that binds

⁹Const # 72: 38, citing from St Francis de Sales, *Letter to Madame de Chantal*, 14 October, AE XII, 359.

them together in a self-giving communion (cf Const # 79: 41). Our religious community becomes the locus and the spectrum in which we live our consecration through the vows and commit ourselves to the same mission of the Kingdom of God. Thus, well-lived-out community life in spiritual communion, fraternal communion and missionary commitment becomes the sign and witness to the Triune God Himself (cf Const # 81: 42; # 80: 41).

1.7.3 Some Pillars of the Edifice of Community

1.7.3.1 Some abiding features

If community is the edifice of religious consecration for mission, then there are essential pillars that build and sustain this edifice. Some of them are Eucharist-centredness, oneness and unity amidst all differences and diversities, belongingness and loyalty, respect, positive regard and appreciation, openness and transparency, understanding and empathy, concern and support, self-giving and generosity, sacrifice and adjustment, cooperation and teamwork, and forgiveness and reconciliation. Special care is taken to shun all forces of division and discrimination, unhealthy competition, ego-projection and promotion, and destructive criticism and behaviour (cf Const # 82 – 90).

1.7.3.2 Hospitality as a distinct mark

We also make a special mention of hospitality as a distinct Fransalian feature. Our communities become welcome homes, without any discrimination, and radiating our characteristic Fransalian cheerfulness, of course, ensuring that our community life is not disrupted (cf Const # 93 – 94).

1.7.3.3. Care for the Sick and Aged as an Imperative

Further, our religious communities shall be abodes of joy and contentment for the sick and aged confreres where they can grow old gracefully through an atmosphere of special concern, care and respect for them (cf Const # 96).

1.7.3.4. The Role of the Superior

Sound community life also places a special responsibility on the Superior of the community. Though all hold the same grace and duty of religious consecration and mission, nevertheless a superior being the “steward” of the community holds an added and higher responsibility for the animation of the community members. So he shall be a spiritual and fraternal father. He promotes mutual trust and cooperation, creates an atmosphere to live an authentic religious life, caters to the integral well-being of the members, and animates the common mission of the community and the individual members through regular community meetings (cf Const # 91: 45-46).

1.8 Consecration for Mission: Rooted in Spiritual Communion

1.8.1 Consecration for Mission: Rooted in Spiritual Communion

Our religious consecration and mission become meaningful and effective only in a God-oriented life. “The meaning of our religious consecration is our life in Christ. He is the beginning and end of our life and apostolate” (Const # 102: 49). Apart from God, we shall have no life, no growth and no fruition (cf Jn 15. 4-6). This is characterized by three aspects: a life, centred on Christ, a life in communion with Christ, and a life renewed by the Spirit (cf Const # 102 – 119).

1.8.2 Features and Conditions for a God-oriented life

Such a life of spiritual communion is nurtured, manifested and testified in being constantly tuned to God's presence and action in our lives; openness to be led by the Spirit; interior silence; a certain discipline and asceticism; and a profound and steady conversion and renewal that make us turn away from our sins and become more like him (cf Const # 103: 49-50; # 113: 53; # 115: 54).

1.8.3 Effects of God-oriented Life

A God-oriented life makes us his "authentic disciples and effective apostles" (Const # 102: 49); makes us "recognize the power of His Spirit in our apostolic activities" (Const # 103: 50); makes us more self-emptying, love and service-minded (cf Const # 103: 49-50), and makes us "more committed to our consecrated life and effective in our apostolate" (Const # 115: 54; cf 81: 42; # 104: 50).

1.8.4 Means of fostering Spiritual life

The greatest means of fostering our spiritual life is a devout celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is the "Sun of our spiritual life"¹⁰ The Holy Eucharist has a twofold effect: it preserves us from the corruption of sin and makes us pure, good and beautiful like Him¹¹.

The frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also highly recommendable and effective in our spiritual growth. It keeps us humble to acknowledge our human fragility and sinfulness. It arouses in us a profound sense of repentance so as to seek God's forgiving mercy and live graced life (# 114: 54).

Besides these two royal means of spiritual fecundity, personal prayer, daily meditation, common prayers, a special devotion to Mary et cetera go a long way in our spiritual journey (cf # 106 – 115: 51-54).

1.9. Consecration for Mission, cultivated in and through Formation (cf # 120 – 163)

1.9.1 Formation: Ongoing and progressive

Formation does not mean only the prescribed years of formation, confined only to the period till the priestly ordination. It is constant, ongoing and perennial till our last breath. Whole life is a continuous process of ongoing formation. Formation is Trinitarian because it is a process of offering and disposing ourselves to be "formed by the Father through Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Const # 120: 57; cf # 121: 57-58).

1.9.2 Aim and Objectives of Formation

Our whole formation aims to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ, after the example of our Patron and Founder, to be totally committed to love and serve God and His Church. Under this mantle of Christ-likeness, formation strives in the path of self-discovery, discernment and equipment to meet the demands of our mission (cf Const # 122 – 123: 58-59).

1.9.3 Conditions for Formation

We can speak of three agencies of formation. They are namely the self, God and the formators. The formee is the subject of formation, the Holy Spirit is the primary agent and the formators are the secondary or

¹⁰St Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Second Part, Chapter 14, 112-114, quoted in *Const* # 104.

¹¹ Ibid.

intermediate agents of formation. Accordingly, a formee must be steered by a sense of self-responsibility, docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and transparency to the guidance of formators. These are the essential conditions or prerequisites (cf Const # 122: 58).

Besides these, there are also some supportive agents and conditions. These are the entire congregation, each respective province or administrative unit, every community and every member. Every member, every community and the whole congregation assume a collective responsibility to ensure a conducive atmosphere for growth. Meanwhile, provinces are committed to evolve and organize their own specific formation programme, within the parameters of the Fransalian Programme for the entire congregation. The following shall be ensured: the preparation of adequate and appropriate formation personnel, provision of necessary facilities, and close monitoring of the whole process (cf Const # 127 – 130: 60-61).

1.9.4 Qualities and Tasks of Formators

The formators are to be men of integrity, competence, and prayerfulness. They are to be imbued with Salesian spirituality and virtues. They are to adapt themselves to differences of temperament, age and culture of the formees. They are to be exemplary witnesses. Their task is clear and focused. It is to inspire and challenge the formees, bring out the best in them, instil in them a love for the Congregation and its mission, foster genuine community life, assist the formees in their search to understand the ways of God for them in a process of dialogue, and to discern the authenticity of their vocation (cf Const # 161 – 163: 75-76).

1.9.5 Formation as Holistic

Good formation is integral and holistic and not fragmented. It takes into account various aspects of human life. True formation is deeply spiritual, being groomed in intimacy with God. It is ecclesial, in fidelity to the Church. It is missionary, being committed to the mission of the Church. It is cultural wherein it inserts itself in different cultural and social contexts and accepts every culture and tries to nurture and promote whatever is true, good and noble. It is intellectual, engaged in sound intellectual pursuits. It is integrally emotional, seeking growth in self-knowledge, inner freedom and emotional maturity. It is social, learning to cultivate balanced relationships and genuine friendships. It is also profoundly Fransalian, growing in the spirit and spirituality of the Patron, the Founder and the Congregation (cf Const # 122 – 127: 58-60).

1.10 Consecration for Mission: Animated and channelized by Authority

1.10.1 The Source of Authority is God

God is the source and origin of all authority. All authority comes from God. It is divinely originated and sanctioned. It is God-given and not self-accredited, not self-acquired and not humanly instituted. As divine and sacred, authority cannot be manipulated or abused (cf Const # 164: 77).

1.10.2 Aim and Spirit of Authority

Authority is meant to discover, discern and seek God's will alone, carry out the mission of the Lord, bear witness to the values of the Gospel, and serve others in a spirit of self-emptying love (cf Const # 164 – 165: 77-78).

1.10.3 Role and Duties of Superiors

Superiors are the agents and instruments of authority. A twofold essential condition for a superior is being clothed with the life of Christ himself, and being all to all and helpful to all. A superior ought to have tender, paternal, nourishing and pastoral care toward his subjects. He trusts always in God's providence and nurtures a serene and equanimous mind. He lives a virtuous life. He is marked by loyalty to the charism and demands of the congregation. He sets an example to the confreres (cf Const # 165 – 167: 77-78).

His role can be characterized as threefold: building up – animating - promoting a fraternal, spiritual and missionary community. This is all oriented to a collective witness to the Gospel (cf Const # 168 – 171: 78-80).

1.10.4 Duty of the Members

Members are obliged to obey their superiors knowingly, willingly and cheerfully. They are to cooperate with active and responsible obedience. They shall shun all individualistic tendencies in a collective sense of community life and mission. They do all this, not out of fear but out of love (cf Const # 172).

PART II

MSFS GENERAL DIRECTORY

2.1 General Directory: The Practicum of the Constitutions

If the Constitutions delineates the core-identity of a Congregation, the General Directory outlines the practical guidelines and directions for how to actualize that core-identity in and through the Charism and the Apostolates. The Constitutions roots us in the essentials. The General Directory through its practical norms and directions, takes us to those roots and ensures the ways to follow the essentials. The Constitutions enshrines the broader parameters for living our religious life and mission while the General Directory provides the concrete steps, methods and measures to implement those parameters. The Constitutions inspires and motivates us to live an authentic consecrated and missionary life. The General Directory animates and directs that journeying.

The Constitutions challenges us and the General Directory accompanies us in addressing those challenges. The Constitutions breathes out the “spirit” of our identity and the General Directory articulates and “enfleshes” the spirit in well-formulated guidelines and policies.

As such, the Constitutions and the General Directory are not two entirely separate or exclusive entities. The General Directory is the practical outflow of the Constitutions. The General Directory derives its existence and merit to the extent it is faithful to the Constitutions and to the extent it helps to articulate and implement the spirit and principles of the Constitutions.

2.2 General Directory: Indicator of the Dynamism of the Constitutions

As the practical guide to the Constitutions, the General Directory is constantly susceptible to the challenges and changes of diverse contexts and situations. Therefore, it is subject to revisions and modifications from time to time. Such need for changes in no way belittles the bindingness or stability of the Constitutions. Instead, it indicates the beautiful blend of constancy and variability. There are some basics that remain stable irrespective of the times and places. At the same time, they are in a dynamic process of evolving their relevance in response to the changing times.

Such amendments and modifications of the rules and regulations, implications and orientations do not need the approval of the Holy See. A two-thirds majority in the General Chapter would suffice for their approval. However, we must make sure that all the norms and guidelines should be in conformity with the tenets of the Constitutions. In case of a contradiction between the Constitutions and the General Directory, the Constitutions always prevails.

2.3 The Present General Directory: Fruit of an Assiduous Process

The present General Directory is the latest text, approved by the 18th General Chapter 2007. It is based on the New Text of the Constitutions, approved by the Holy See on 24 January 2006. It is the fruit of a process of discernment by the entire Congregation. This process began with the mandate by the Extra-Ordinary General Chapter 2003 to evolve the General Directory based on the new Constitutions. Subsequently, a Drafting Commission was appointed by the Superior General. The diligence, attentiveness and sagacity of work of the Drafting Commission resulted in a base-document. This was subjected to an elaborate process of deliberation by all the members of the Congregation who came up with various suggestions and recommendations. The General Chapter 2007 further discerned over it and approved it. Accordingly, the present General Directory came into effect after the General Chapter 2007.

PART III

CONSECRATION FOR MISSION: CHALLENGES AND REMEDIES

3.1 A Life of Witness

Witnessing life is the need of the hour. It calls for the following: To live authentic and exemplary lives; To avoid all the ways and occasions which manifest a sharp contrast and contradiction between our way and standard of living and that of the people; To make sure not to give a wrong impression to the people, that we are not practising what we are preaching; To lay more accent on “being” with real depth, interiority, and authenticity of religious living, and not merely “doing” clusters of activities that can appear to be shallow and superficial; and To be simple in lifestyle and moderation in the possession and use of material things, be it the gadgets or the vehicles.

3.2 Promoting a Culture of Integration

In the wake of mixed communities and divergent ministry situations, the question of integration becomes a real concrete concern. This integration must happen on the part of all, especially bearing in mind the constant tension and pressure on account of delicate disparities between majority-minority, local-nonlocal, et cetera. There is a need to become aware of, accept and appreciate and foster what is good and positive in every culture and region. Care is needed to avoid all unconscious tendencies of “over-boarding” or “transplanting” a particular culture or style of functioning. There is a need to get rid of the feeling that others are a threat or block to our freedom. We must foster conscientiously in our communities a fraternal atmosphere of mutual acceptance, respect, sensitivity, concern, and support. We need to ensure a fair and equitable sharing and entrusting of responsibilities. It is also worthwhile to check and see, how we integrate ourselves with the people, in our parishes, in our schools, and anywhere in our ministry.

3.3 Focus and Clarity of Purpose Versus Distraction – preoccupation

There is a lament and blame about defocus of priests and religious and the consequent dispersing of their energies and resourcefulness. Therefore, there is a need for more self-focus and God-focus, leading to a steady self-transformation and reorientation to God and the spiritual.

3.4 Sustaining Mission Culture and Dynamism Versus Institutionalism and Comfort-seeking

There are increasing observations and laments, which are not always ungrounded, that there is a slackening of love for the mission. A Mission culture and zeal demand that we are deeply conscious of our very missionary nature as the Church of Christ. In this context, we are called for –

A **Clear Mission–primacy**: It is to be imbued with a clear sense and spirit of mission, rising above all the pulls toward institutionalism and comfort-zones.

A **Holistic Mission**: Not merely sacramental parochial ministry, but concerned with the holistic growth and the integral living of the human person.

A **sound Spiritual Mission**: The prime objective and end of all mission is, the spiritual animation and renewal of the faithful, through faith-formation and faith-maturation.

A **Trans-Cultural Mission**: This summons – (a) To rise above the narrow demarcations of regionalism, linguism, culturism, parochialism, provincialism, et cetera (b) To check against exaggerated self-autonomy, individualistic interests, privatized enterprises, et cetera (c) To move toward “congregationalism” through collective discernment, decision-making and working.

A **Global / Universal mission**: This implies – (a) Concern for the missions of the entire congregation (b) Concern for the poor missions (c) Concern for the diminishing provinces (d) Special concern for Africa

3.5 Blending Harmoniously the Apostolates of Mission, Formation, Education, and Social Actions

What is important is an integrated mission, especially integrating all the four apostolates of Mission, Formation, Education, and Social action. We do not segregate them as water-tight compartments and do not foster unhealthy competition.

3.6 Primacy to Spiritual Life Versus Activism and Indifferentism

This is a culture of Depth and interior strength Versus Activism and shallowness. This is a new culture of silence and reflection, internalisation and depth, prayer and devotion. It is a call to be busy-souls, rather than busy-bodies. It is a call to Love and live prayer. It is to be deeply convinced that it is prayer that gives focus, direction and strength to every work and ensures that every work must flow from prayer. All ability without prayer is futility, but all ability with prayer is nobility. Primacy to spiritual life will remain non-negotiable. Work shall not become a substitute for prayer. Accordingly, nothing can become a reason or excuse to compromise on fidelity to prayer and regularity to spiritual concerns.

3.7 Ensuring A Qualitative Community Life Versus Individualism

Community living is binding. No one is exempted from communion. Priority is to be always to the community living and concerns, over individualistic interests. Community-oriented and community-involved ministries should be emphasised over individual-centred ministries and self-demarcated enterprises. There is a need for more sharing and in-flow of information and responsibilities, rather than ‘enclosed’ territories of activities. We must foster a strong sense of belonging to the community and shun all hampering factors and safeguard the religious spirit.

3.8 Consecration / Vowed fidelity Versus Infidelity

This calls for a faithful consecrated life, against all easy violations and aberrations of the consecrated vows. We need to rediscover the increasing relevance of the vows. Vows are living witnesses, signs of

contradiction to a world, that is dominated by three main trends, namely, materialism-consumerism (vs. Poverty), physicalism-sensualism (vs. Chastity) and individualism-egocentrism (vs. Obedience).

3.9 A Holistic and Liberative Education

It becomes a great concern, how we effectively address the challenges of the mission of Education, like dry professionalism, value-decline, anti-Christianism, external pressures, and lure for money, power, et cetera. Training and improving the quality of teachers, by way of motivating them and catechising them through seminars, is one big area of challenge. It is also another concern to ensure regular and solid catechetical instruction to the students. Ways and means have to be explored, which can cater to the holistic growth of the children, and not merely the academic performance.

3.10 A Transformative Formation

Judiciousness and discretion are to be at work so that the right personnel are selected and appointed as formators. A formator has to be sufficiently equipped with the needed training in studies and skills so that he can guide the formees more confidently and effectively. However, we need to bear in mind that mere academic qualification does not qualify one to be a good formator; one may be an excellent academician and professor but need not be a fitting formator. We must realize more and more that the effectiveness of formation is an issue of Credibility and not mere ability, Authenticity and not duplicity, Integrity and not dishonesty, and Integration and not dividedness. Proper and apt criteria are to be in place to screen and assess the aptitude and motivation of the candidates. A qualitative Vocation promotion will continue to be a major concern.

3.11 Empowering Social Apostolate and Innovative Ministries

For sure, much good is being done concerning social and innovative action. However, we shall continue to make sure that every community and every centre makes a close search into the possible avenues of social empowerment, health, and hygiene awareness, family and youth direction and counselling, economic upliftment et cetera. Thus, we are not content with the mere sacramental parochial ministry but are concerned and committed to the overall growth of the people entrusted to our care. That is in fact, the fullness of our spiritual mission – to enable the people to discover and live with dignity as children of God!

3.12 An Integral Spirit of Stewardship

Stewardship is not merely money matters or financial management, or merely the question of gaining or spending. It is to be seen in the whole context of our Consecrated Vowed life: Financial management with a sense of stewardship becomes the sign and means of our consecrated vows, especially the Vow of poverty. This includes three essential financial aspects and principles, namely financial transparency, financial accountability, and financial integrity. Thus, all the traces and actions of manipulation, embezzlement, mismanagement, squandering, lavishness, et cetera will be counter-witnesses to our very consecration, and not merely a financial failure. Accordingly, all efforts are to be oriented to safeguard – cultivate – foster these 3 sound financial directives, on all levels – the personal, community, diocese, or province

3.13 Authentic Leadership Versus manipulative managing

What the Church badly needs today is leaders, and not mere managers, who just manage or run the show through hook or crook. We need, not those who are hypocritical, manipulative and seeking cheap popularity, but those who are truly mystical, prophetic, communed with God and the confreres and

committed to the people. We need those who are authentic disciples and effective apostles – those who can sit at the feet of the Lord as a disciple and walk with and for the Lord as an apostle. We need those who are genuine prophets, that is, essentially positive-looking, meaning that he not only stands against sth. Negative but also stands for sth. Positive (cf. Jer. 1.1-10).

3.14 Culture of New Governance

This calls us to be deeply bound by the norms of committed collegiality, collective responsibility and availability. We need to be essentially guided by the dynamics of cooperation and coordination, in transparency and dialogue. We must foster a more distributive functioning of administration and animation and a fair and equitable sharing of responsibilities on various levels. We need a culture of more focused and specified attention, monitoring, follow-up, evaluation and further action. We must avail the existing resources at the disposal of many. We need to continue concerted efforts concerning the networking of ministries, personnel and material resources in the given context and possibilities. We must also foster a spirit of inter-province collaboration and support while we sustain all the enriching diversities and challenges. A culture of forums needs to be fostered as a sign of collective owning up.

Conclusion

We have been reflecting on our MSFS Constitutions. We have tried to rediscover and recapture its spirit and direction. We realize once again that the constitutions unfolds to us our core-identity. This is soaked into the central theme of “Consecration for Mission”. The more we are familiar with and in conformity with our constitutions, the more we will be faithful to our consecration and mission. Thus, our concern is not merely a matter of study and knowledge but fidelity and renewal. The first part discloses to us the essentials of our constitutions. The second part on General Directory shows us the link between the constitutions and the General Directory and helps us to live a life in fidelity to them. The last part reminds us of certain challenges and possible remedial measures. May all this study and reflection help us to be authentic disciples and effective apostles of Christ, in the spirit of our Patron St Francis de Sales and our Founder, Father Peter Mermier!