

"But it shall not be so among you" (Mk 10:43)

*Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General*

INFO SSCC Brothers No 173 – 1 March 2023



Dear Brothers,

Fraternal greetings from Indonesia, where Jean-Blaise and I are making our canonical visitation. We entrust this visit to your prayers.

I would like to share with you some reflections regarding the separation of brothers from the Congregation. Often appearing on the agenda for our General Government meetings are requests from brothers who have decided to leave the Congregation and are seeking either a dispensation from temporary or perpetual vows, exclaustation in view of an incardination, or loss of the clerical state and dispensation from the attendant obligations. In some situations, we have had to deal with the expulsion of some brothers from our family.

Canon law and our particular law, our Constitutions, in their wisdom, foresee such situations arising and offer criteria, norms and procedures to carry out the proper process. On the one hand, we know that each case is different. Often, a brother has gone through a painful and difficult situation that has led him to make his decision. On the other hand, part of the service of authority, at the local and general level, is to accompany the brothers in their discernment and decision making. The procedures, in the end, are a help offered by the Church so that each one can find his new place in it, while continuing to serve and love the Lord.

Our Constitutions have this to say this:

148. Juridical separation from the Congregation is a process that always requires a climate of respect for persons. This presupposes dialogue in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment.

Part of this climate of respect of which our Constitutions speak is to know and follow properly the procedures which are necessary for each case of separation. For this purpose, the major superior and his council have at their disposal a guide document - "Juridical Questions". They can also rely at the local level on expert advice or on what we in the General Government can offer.

However, what pains us as a General Government is that dialogue, prayerfulness and discernment have often been practically absent. We more and more hear from brothers who write directly to us with their requests for separation, without going through their respective

superiors. Then, rather than asking for a grace or an indult from the Congregation in which they have made vows or from the Church which has conferred the ministries, some brothers consider that it is their "right", due to "their" vocation, "their" ministry. The "good" reasons often appear to be only on their side whereas the difficulties and problems are attributed to others, the community, the superiors. Frequently, what prevails more than discernment and prayer are "hidden agendas", that contain clear but not expressed interests and decisions already taken. The local communities of these brothers are surprised because they had no idea what the brother was going through. For their part, the superiors are faced with "faits accomplis" in which they can neither question nor help to mature the decision, because it is too late. Rarely have I seen a brother who is experiencing a difficulty with the community or in his vocation ask his community or superiors for help and advice in a timely manner. As regards the importance of the support of the brothers in our formation, is that not something that we express with gratitude and joy on the day of our profession or ordination to the diaconate or priesthood? Why is it that when we need it most we do not know how to ask for this support?

I confess that when a brother decides to leave the congregation and before talking to his brothers or his superior, has already spoken to a bishop who wants to receive him in his diocese, I say to myself: "And what happened to our SSCC religious life that it got lost along the way? If there has not been proper discernment, the difficulties or tensions that the brother is experiencing, will follow him, like a shadow, into diocesan life, or wherever else he goes. I remember the wise words of a bishop who had been approached by a brother who wished to be incardinated in his diocese: "If you are not happy in your religious family, you will not be happy in my diocese either. You'd better go back to your community and face your difficulties there with them".

To those in leadership I say this: do not fail to accompany and, if necessary, challenge the brothers, who find themselves in difficulties in the community, in the ministry or in their vocation. It is part of your service of care for the brothers.

To the brothers who are experiencing difficulties in your vocation and life: Count on your brothers and open your heart to them in a timely way to find support, advice and your prayer.

To all our religious community and local superiors: We know each other well and we do try to really love each other as brothers. Let us overcome a certain modesty and, when appropriate, let us dare to ask and question each other, always in a climate of respect, clarity and charity. If there is something about your brother that worries you or if you have learned something about him that causes you concern, this needs to be addressed as soon as possible. It is better to err than not to act in time.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General