



Иисус

Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord...

a private association of the faithful

**Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Parish
Volodarskovo 22
690001 Vladivostok, Russian Federation**

Dear “Searchers,”

One searcher asked me this question, which might interest you all: “From what I understand, the fusing of contemplative community life and active priestly life is the aim of canons. I would love to hear how you live that out.” To say that the canons have a “fused life” or a “vita mixta,” as it is frequently referred to, might be a valid way of speaking about us, but only as looking backward in time after purely contemplative and purely active orders have been founded. Actually, the canons predate all of that, and our roots even go into the Old Testament! So I personally don’t like that formulation. It is “post hoc” and not part of the canonical ideal as such.

I much prefer the model that the prophet Samuel shows us quite simply from the OT: He was dedicated to the Lord’s service in the temple, which means he was active in the prayer life of the community as well as carrying out the ministry of the Lord inside and outside of the temple, liking anointing and advising kings and laity, and serving as the voice of the Lord when so instructed. Without listening to the voice of the Lord he would have been useless as a prophet. Without carrying out the Lord’s command to teach and sanctify, his prayer life would have had no outlet in action. Even the word “prophet” implies outward action. Thus canons in general aren’t “purely contemplative”, nor is our service “purely active” (and not even “purely priestly”). Prayer should guide our actions—but we aren’t talking about just private prayer. Our prayer is the Liturgy of the Hours—the official public prayer of the Church, which is already “active” prayer—but like Mary we have to ponder it in our heart. And our service isn’t just humanitarian aid coming to those in need, but help and work from someone consecrated and dedicated to the Lord’s service in the temple.

It seems to me that a “vita mixta” formulation is a functionary model, and not very useful. Function is not so important as being. And what we are is more important than what we do. What we do follows from what we are. We are the dedicated temple clergy of Christianity. All else follows from that.

Of course it is necessary to say that in more recent centuries, the “dedicated temple clergy of Christianity” have almost disappeared, their “function” having been taken over by secular diocesan clergy. Which is part of the reason that almost any cathedral or big church, especially in America, seems like a dead space, rather than a living temple.

Most canonical orders which remain from the past are those which were more isolated from historical events (events like destruction by Napoleon, for example,) by the fact that they were not in the cities, but in the countryside. Thus the average canonical community today resembles a Benedictine community of monks, especially since Benedictine monks have taken on a much more “active” lifestyle, so they have come to more resemble canonical communities! The last group of canons regular of diocese right was closed in Spain about 20 years ago, a victim of revolution and anticlericalism. There is still one canonical abbey-nullius in Switzerland. There had been thousands of such independent communities in the Middle Ages. Now there remain only canons of

pontifical right, and a few like us who are just starting, and are (hopefully soon, in our case) of diocesan right until we grow more.

My friend Fr Adam from Ulan Ude, Buratia, Russia, gave me a CD with all the photos that he took when we were in Jerusalem. Here is a photo of the Shrine of the Resurrection inside the building of the Holy Sepulchre. It reminds me of one of the most famous of all orders of canons regular, the Canons Regular of the Holy Sepulchre. They inspired many to become canons and inspired many new orders of canons regular during and after the Crusades. They are currently survived only by their women's branch in several European countries. I was able to sit in the Shrine of the Resurrection for many hours, answering pilgrim's and tourist's questions. I was amazed how many tourists come—like from Japan—and have no idea what the building is all about!!

God bless you. Yours truly,

V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

