

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Spirit vs Law
Evangelical Virtues vs Religious Vows
Cannon Law vs Charismas.

EUREKA !

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Intent of this Story.

- ✓ *To set clearly before our minds that the "spirit" and the "ideals" of any movement –religious, or secular - need constantly be preserved and cherished lest they vanish.*
- ✓ *To realize that "norms," rules", "structures", organizations", "constitutions" and "juridical frame-works" are necessary in any society or group.*
- ✓ *They are the framework within which any group or society establishes its self-identity, expresses its purpose and holds itself together.*
- ✓ *To realize that if ever the structures and legal frameworks lose their inner spirit, automatically they become rigid, obsolescent and empty shells, obstructions, not helps.*
- ✓ *To grow in awareness that in religious matters also, there is a danger of turning means into ends, thus that having lost the "essence" of rituals and juridical norms, we may maintain them for their own sake.*
- ✓ *To bear in mind that there must be a continuous dialectical tension between "spirit and law", "ideals and institution", "charisma and organization", "renewal and tradition" for a healthy growth of any social organism religious or secular.*

THE STORY

Narrator: Subash and Dilip were two young enterprising friends. They had spent their school and college days together and now as partners; they spent hours and hours working in their small perfume synthesizing laboratory, trying to discover a new, rare and exquisite perfume that would enchant the scented world.

Subash: Eureka!... We've found it...

Dilip: We've got it at last... yea!!! We discovered it.

Narrator: They were excited and overjoyed at the discovery for which they had toiled for so many years. Their new creation was, indeed, a rich perfume, highly exotic and absolutely bewitching. You could hear them exclaiming:

Dilip 0... Oh... 000.... I almost faint with this delicate scent in the air.

Subash: It's even better than what we expected, isn't it Dilip?

Dilip: Yes, It's enchanting, simply enthralling. It's worth a fortune.

Subash: It's priceless.

Dilip' Now, dear Subash,, what are we going to do with it?

Dilip: Well, for the time being let's square it. Later on we shall see. Now, let each one do with its share what he likes best,

Narrator: So it was. Each had the freedom to do with his share of the newly discovered perfume, what he liked best, in the hope that later on, they might be able to create newer and even more exquisite perfumes. . So, proud of their finding they divided their treasure and went home. Dilip, hurried to share his happiness with his beloved Rohini. He mumbled to himself:

Dilip: With this delightful perfume, she is going to be the talk-of-the- town.

Narrator: So that such precious stuff should not evaporate, Dilip went across the road to a nearby shop, bought a nice yet simple bottle and kept his treasure in it. Back home, Rohini was overjoyed to receive the gift

Rohini: Oh, it's wonderful dear, simply wonderful. It's all for me?...

Dilip: Yes! Darling, I want you to enjoy every bit of It It's the fruit of my many years of hard work, It's all for you.

Narrator: Rohini used the perfume to the full. Every time Rohini and Dilip they went out together, people would be sniffing around them. Their faces spelt jealousy. When finally, the perfume was over, Rohini unceremoniously threw away the bottle. She knew that someday, her husband would bring her a fresh bottle of it. But, what happened to our friend Subash? Let me tell you. He went home with his newly discovered treasure. He muttered to himself:

Subash: This perfume is a real treasure! It's invaluable! I got to preserve it. It's worth a fortune. Not a drop of it should get

evaporated or wasted! A priceless scent with such fragrance should not be kept in an ordinary bottle. I do not want just a bottle; I want one of those most precious porcelain jars. The container has to be as precious as the priceless perfume it will contain.

Narrator: He rushed to an expensive antique shop in town. On one of the shelves he spied a beautifully colored Ming China Jar. He spent a fortune buying that inestimable museum antique. It was a perfect choice, the best match ever. With the utmost care he poured the contents of the perfume into the precious jar. Then he exclaimed.

Subhash: There,... now I have my perfume safely preserved. It has to be kept for ever! I will have to see to it that no one ever touches it... If it gets wasted, the loss would be irreparable. I cannot allow anyone to handle it, lift it or even touch it!....

Narrator: Subash went home and quietly concealed his doubly new-found treasure. Next day, he had a show-case made. He enshrined in it his precious jar and placed a placard on the show-case which read... DO NOT TOUCH...

When one day, some friends of his came over for a visit, they were intrigued by what they saw in the show-case. As they approached the show-case, He yelled at them:

Subash: Do not touch it... can't you read... DO NOT TOUCH IT !?

Narrator: They all wondered... it looks good... but what's so special. At other times he would come running home only to see if the perfume container was still in the show-case. His only concern seemed to be the jar which held the perfume. Even his wife and children dared not come close to it.

Finally, Subash, was so obsessed with the jar that by now his entire life revolved round the show-case. He would sit there from morn to night.

By now, He had given up his work in search of new formulas at his Perfume synthesizing lab. He remained like a sentry guard, almost paralyzed watching his jar.

As the days, months and years rolled by, Subash grew older and older; he grew also more and more attached to the jar... His life was frozen, glued to the jar.....till one day Subash was no more...

Soon after his death, his wife broke open the show-case, she brought out the jar... opened the lid to see what was there... THERE WAS NOTHING! The Jar was Empty!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Subash and Dilip discovered a new "essence", a precious perfume. Both had to preserve it from evaporation and waste.

- Both looked for some container - "structure" - that would safeguard their perfume, their treasure.
- Dilip picked up a functional container - a bottle good enough - that would fulfill the purpose he had in view.
- The bottle itself - its quality, size, appearance - was only a means to hold the perfume. The perfume was the real precious thing to be preserved. The bottle was just a means of preserving and protecting the essence, the perfume
- When the perfume was over, the bottle was of no value. Rightly so, his wife, Rohini, discarded the bottle.
- Subash, however, looked for a most "precious and beautiful container". He bought a lovely and most expensive Ming China jar. So exquisite it was, that he fell in love with it.
- Finally, the jar, not the perfume, became for him the essential thing.
- From now on, it was not so much the perfume, however precious it was, that had to be preserved but the jar.
- While Dilip's wife discarded the bottle once the perfume was over, Subash clung to his jar even long after the perfume had evaporated.
- So precious was now the jar for him that he would not let it be moved or handled, let alone discarded! Though it was only a container, a means to hold the perfume, for Subash it became an end itself.
- We can apply the moral of the parable to all institutions and systems the Church included.
- In this case we apply to the Religious Life within the Church.
- The value of Religious Life and the Evangelical ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience are precious.
- There was a need to preserve those precious essences for posterity.
- So, the Church, protected them, stabilized and institutionalized them by means the three vows and other legal structures in her Canon Law.
- However, let us not be blind to the dangers of "institutionalism".
- Laws, structures and codes of conduct have a relative and instrumental value.
- They are means, not ends.
- Unfortunately, however, with the passage of time, for many people, they have become "Ming jars" which cannot be touched, which have to be preserved at all costs

- If they are to serve as means, which is what they are meant to do, they have to be continually updated and renewed to respond to changing needs and times.
- If the spirit of poverty would evaporate, the vow of poverty loses its validity and it does not make sense any more.
- The same can be said of the vows of the chastity and obedience.
- When such losses happen, religious vows become Ming jars at whose altars we sacrifice our lives as Subash did.
- It is unfortunate that quite many of us religious, still take vows while the ideals, the essences and the virtues of evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience seem to have evaporated
- Even within the Catholic Church at large, an overemphasis on Canon law, which was meant to preserve the spirit of the Gospel, has become stifling and castrating.
- It is the spirit that of the Gospel and of the Religious Life that has to be renewed,
- It is the spirit that vivifies, not the letter that kills.
- The rules, vows and constitutions of religious congregations are like the "containers" of the charismas of their founders.
- While keeping to the rules and constitutions of their orders, the religious must go beyond them to grasp the evangelical spirit which animated those who founded their orders.
- One sometimes gets the impression that many religious constitutions are empty "Ming China jars"!
- Many of the letters and instructions coming to us from higher authorities sound like Subahs's warnings: Do not touch it! Can't you read? Do not touch it ever!
- Has not our religious world become a Museum of Ming China jars?