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A biannual published by Sanyasa: Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore, in view fostering theological reflection on the life and mission of consecrated life in all its aspects, and in its essential relationship with other forms of Christian life in the Church, with specific reference to the Indian and Asian Reality.

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EDITORIAL

With the coming of Pope Francis at the leadership of the Catholic Church, we have been witnessing something very significant. Through his symbolic actions, gestures and statements, he has been making a clarion call for a decisive shift in the Catholic Church's self-understanding. Though in full continuity with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, he has been calling for, as George Weigel, a distinguished Professor of Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C, puts it, a "re-energizing return to the pentecostal fervor and evangelical passion from which the church was born two millennia ago, and a summons to mission that accelerates the great historical transition from institutional-maintenance Catholicism to the Church of the New Evangelization." His *Evangelii Gaudium*, is certainly and effectively responding to the need of the hour that the Church is faced with. There are in his heart a loving embrace of all humans and environment anywhere and everywhere and a fervent desire to fight against all cultures of exclusion and permeate them with the gospel of joy. Perhaps, this marks the beginning of a new Church that is emerging; a new Church that the Holy Spirit is mysteriously moulding and fashioning as we have entered into a new millennium.

Consecrated life, being at the heart of the Church, is also undergoing a transformation, led by the Spirit. Looking back, we know that new forms of consecrated life have emerged when the Church was flourishing as well as when it was disoriented and unsure of itself. As a charismatic movement, initiated by the Spirit of God in the Church, expressing itself in diverse circumstances and giving rise to new forms through the decline of one form and re-birth into another form, it has remained as a constant evangelizing force all through the history of Church. To remain so, we need to be alert to the possibilities for the future.

This Christmas issue of the Journal carries with it a series of articles that will help us rediscover the inherent evangelizing force of consecrated life, the new directions that the Spirit is revealing to it, some necessary conditions for its transformation, challenges and opportunities from the perspective of Asia, the new ambience that *Evangelii Gaudium* opens to it and the new horizons for its mission.

Narrating consecrated life as a sail boat pushed by the wind of the Spirit of God, *Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes*, tries to respond to the central question: where

is the Spirit leading consecrated life at the beginning of this new millennium? What does the Spirit of God bring about among us? How can we respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7)? What opportunities does the Spirit offer us for our growth, innovation and re-founding? He draws his inspiration from the Working Paper of the World Congress on Consecrated Life and from the final paper of that same Congress. Both these documents present a Christology of the Spirit that opens new horizons in understanding and living religious life in all its different dimensions.

Xavier E. Manavath, in his article, gives a broader framework for understanding the Word of God in its various meanings and shows how Christ, the *Eternal Word Made Flesh* becomes the central concern in the life and mission of the Religious. As Religious who are at the heart of the Church, the author wants to deepen in them, a *sentire cum ecclesia* especially as the Church has initiated a process to revive herself on the theme “the Word of God.” His attempt is to help the religious re-focus on the goal of their consecration, re-discover their founding charism along with its variety and their formation in relation to the broader framework of understanding Word of God.

The next article by *Lode Wostyn*, though written in the context of the Philippines, situates us in the broader context of Asia and helps us see the world and the Church from an Asian perspective. He elaborates on the first step of the reflection-action spiral and helps us see the realities that challenge the religious in a global world and in Asia. Bringing the religious face to face with these challenges within this post-modern age, the author states that religious life in Asia manifests itself as a reality of many contrasts, marked by signs of renewal on the one hand, and evidence of decadence and dead weights on the other. Choosing to look at this reality in a more constructive and creative way, he proposes some opportunities which flow from the process of globalization and from the special challenging issues that are particularly stressed in FABC documents.

Facing the realities of the various challenges can be very stressful and it is very crucial how we deal with and respond to them. *Shanti Jose*, in her article, shows impact of stress in the life journey of religious (especially women) and its influence on the evolution of their self. She analyses the stressful experience of women religious, in relation to various aspects of their lives and shows their hidden call to make meaningful choices and take necessary steps in the realization of their life-goal. Such a response, she argues, is possible only through a process of self-awareness, awareness of the realities of life and emotional, social and spiritual integration.

Evangelii Gaudium, the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis is, undoubtedly, the much discussed and widely appreciated ecclesial document of our time. His very name and symbolic actions, ever since he became the Pope, are substantiated with a sharing of his deep convictions about the Church and her mission of evangelization in the world of today. *Johnson Thurackal*, in his article, takes us to the heart of the message of this document, outlining its main thrust as an invitation addressed to all in order that they may discover, live, proclaim and share the joy of the Gospel. A positive response to this invitation will certainly involve being bold and creative in a process of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization.

The last article by *Josep M. Abella*, is basically drawn from the address given by him at the meeting of the Union of Superiors General (USG), Rome in 2010. He reflects on the new horizons for the mission of the consecrated life, its challenges and offers possible avenues in the future to consolidate the apostolic, prophetic and missionary dimension of consecrated life. Discerning the challenges and possibilities, offered by the context of globalization, secularization, cultural and religious pluralism, he envisages the need for shift of emphasis from the traditional approach to a more creative, participative and collaborative modes of doing mission, thereby, opening up new horizons in the way we understand and do mission.

This issue also carries with it two book reviews, written by Joseline Mary, SJC and Richard N. Jude John, OSB, two of the Post Graduate students of Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life.

As the passionate and redeeming love of the Lord unfolds for us so beautifully and intimately in that little of Babe of Bethlehem, born for us and offers us the gift of the new year 2014, I just want to wish all the readers of this Journal, a very joyful Christmas and a grace-filled New Year. May this issue of the Journal stir up our hearts with the joy of the Gospel and make us also sharers of that joy, especially to those who feel deprived and excluded!

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)

WHERE IS THE SPIRIT LEADING CONSECRATED LIFE AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS NEW MILLENNIUM?

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

“I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name... Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the in-habitants of the earth... I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ... Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 3: 8-13).

Beyond the particularities of every continent, of every nation or country, of every order or congregation, of every community or person, consecrated life is like a sailboat pushed by the wind of the Spirit. The wind, which pushes the sailboat, determines the rhythm of its speed, orientation and stability. There are different kinds of wind: it can be a tailwind that favors sailing, or a headwind that shakes the ship and deviates it from its destination or even threatens to destroy it.

Today consecrated life is like a sailboat pushed by the wind of the Spirit. In many places she has no tailwind; she is slowed and finds a lot of obstacles in her path. But when consecrated life is docile to the tailwind of the Spirit and allows to be moved by it, then it has nothing to fear!

In this article, I will try to answer the question: where is the Spirit leading consecrated life at the beginning of this new millennium? What does the Spirit of God bring about among us? How can we respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7)? What opportunities does the Spirit offer us for our growth, innovation and refounding?

First of all, let me find an inspiration for this article from *Instrumentum Laboris* of the World Congress on Consecrated Life and in the final paper of that same Congress.

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF, a renowned theologian in the field of Consecrated Life, has written extensively on the subject and developed the theology of the 'Different Christian Forms of Life'. He has authored numerous books and articles on various theological themes, and is currently serving as Professor at the Institute of Religius Life, Madrid.

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND JESUS

How do we know where the Spirit is leading humanity, the Church, consecrated life? Let us look at Jesus, our Lord, the Giver of the Holy Spirit. In the “Working Paper” of the Congress we find a very interesting theological approach. Jesus is presented as our contemporary. But the Holy Spirit is the main agent in the whole document that presents us with a Christology of the Spirit, is able to explain and change a lot of things in religious life today.

1.1. Jesus, our Contemporary

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the main mover of history. We believe that our time – the beginning of this XXI century – belongs to the age of the Spirit. The Old Testament was the age of God the Father; the New Testament, the age of Jesus, the Son of God; and from Pentecost until now we are in the age of the Spirit.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* starts with a beautiful and profound statement I would like to read and comment on:

“Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, the Mediator of the New Covenant and of the Kingdom, is our contemporary. He does not belong to the past.”

This confession about the contemporaneity of Jesus is of extreme importance. Jesus does not belong to the past – he is our contemporary, he walks with us in our historical journey. Those who remain fixed in the past cannot follow the “contemporary” Jesus. They are far from him. Jesus is not a museum piece, but a living companion of all human beings. For that, those who certainly belong to the past refuse to follow Jesus today. If Jesus is our contemporary we have to write again a new Christology, the Christology of our time.

How can Jesus be our contemporary? Through the Holy Spirit! The Gospel of John offers us the most beautiful texts for a Christology of the Spirit. Jesus has promised us his Spirit:

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I” (John 14:25-29).

The Spirit will be sent by the Father but “in the name of Jesus”. The Spirit or Paraclete will teach everything and remind the disciples all that Jesus said. The

Spirit becomes the Teacher and Memory of Jesus. At the same time, Jesus talks about his departure, but for a short while, because he will come again, not in the future, but with the Spirit: "I am going away and I am coming to you." Jesus will come to us in the Spirit.

In another text, taken from the discourse in the Last Supper, Jesus explains that the Spirit, who comes from the Father, will be sent by him:

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father; the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf" (John 15:26-27).

In this text, The Spirit is called by Jesus "Spirit of truth". Because of this, the Holy Spirit will testify on behalf of Jesus. She is presented as the best Witness to Jesus. This Spirit – Paraclete – is, moreover, the leader who will guide the disciples into all the truth. The Spirit of God and of Jesus knows everything from them. She will "speak whatever he hears and he will declare the things that are to come":

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-15).

Thanks to the Spirit, Jesus is our contemporary. The Spirit raises in us the memory of Jesus, the re-presentation of Him. The Spirit is the living remembrance of all the words and teachings of the Lord. Thanks to him we can hear again, like the first time, the gospel as it was preached by the lips of Jesus himself. It is the Spirit who testifies on behalf of Jesus. There is no duality between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will reveal to us the things that are to come and lead us into the ways of the Kingdom.

This is the reason why we ask: Where is the Spirit leading consecrated life in this new millennium?

1.2. Dilemma: What kinds of Spirit or spirits move us?

Our problem now is to distinguish the action of the Spirit of Jesus from the actions of the Evil Spirit.

"I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling" (John 16:1).

Sometimes the action of the Holy Spirit is blocked within us. At other times

we experience the actions of other spirits that certainly are not the Holy Spirit. Discernment of Spirit is then absolutely necessary.

The bad spirits block within us the action of the Spirit. This happens (IL 49):

- When we let ourselves be motivated by a fear of taking any risks and so refrain from making suitable decisions that might displease a dominant group or authority. Fear paralyzes. It reduces our capacity to risk and moves us to seek secure positions. We become traditionalists, conservatives, persons closed to renewal and innovation (IL 49).
- When superiors allow themselves to be influenced by fear, a weak leadership develops that tries to please everyone and everything and, as a result, becomes very indecisive or too subservient to higher authorities. In a word, such superiors are more willing to please than to act. It is difficult to exercise authority and obedience in an evangelical way in such a situation. Today we lack women and men with sufficient moral authority to lead communities in creative fidelity to their charism (IL 50).
- Groups that try to hinder conciliar renewal and impose their laws on certain aspects of life and in certain circumstances change the collective charism into something routinary and decadent. In these cases creative persons are looked upon with jealousy and are controlled; the most they are permitted to do is to make some superficial changes that do not threaten the status quo. In this way the “new wine” is poured into “old wineskins” (Mt 9:17; IL 51).

We are in the times of the Mission of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been sent and acts all over the world. Her action, nonetheless, is not evident, but mysterious. Jesus said in reference to the Spirit:

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8)

We should be cautious when we try to answer the question: Where is the Spirit leading consecrated life? We could very easily attribute to the Holy Spirit what belongs to bad spirits. We have to follow the rules for discernment now more than in the past. Even though we are able to find answers to our question – after a long discernment – we have to maintain an attitude of humility, fear and awe. We have to be aware that the mysterious actions of the Holy Spirit surpass us in every way.

We must not hold as absolute that which is only relative. The only perspective we have to accept is the one that the Holy Spirit manifests to us.

Ours is not the best of time for discernment. There is a lot of confusion and doubts in the Church. When it seems that we are more certain and confident about some doctrines on re-ligious life, for example, more doubts arise.

I believe that the best criterion for discernment should be the one offered to us by the Gospel of John; it comes from the Spirit of God that impels us to become:

- Living memory of Jesus (John 14:26),
- Community of different persons and charisms (2 Cor 13:13),
- Women and men moved by a creative and transforming imagination (*Spiritus creator*) (Gen 1:2).

These three characteristics can sum up the mission and action of the Spirit among us. The Spirit acts where we can verify or realize these three perspectives: memory, communion and creative imagination. These will be the scope of the next three part my article.

2. “MEMORIA JESU” (JN 14:26)

2.1. The Primacy of the Word of God and the Spirit

One of the gifts, the best gift consecrated life has received from the Spirit of God in our time is a greater knowledge of the Lord Jesus and his Gospel. The remarkable recovery of the Word of God in the fields of formation, spirituality and mission, resulted in the rediscovery of the person of Jesus from much more existential and challenging perspective. This is the best gift consecrated life can receive from the Holy Spirit. This is the main treasure consecrated life has in our time. In the past, unfortunately, consecrated life was guided by rules, laws, ascetic counsels, but less than by the Gospel. Religious life today is much closer to the Spirit because she is much closer to the Word of God.

The ethical challenge of consecrated life for us, women and men religious, is more than ever Gospel-centered. We are not so much concerned with ascetic traditions which are not clearly connected with the Gospel. We are well aware that “to love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself ... is much more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mk 12:33).” When Jesus was in the temple, he said: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Mt 12:7). We are now moved by the Gospel of love and compassion, the Gospel of respect for human rights and dignity. A lot of norms and regulations have been deleted in our religious

life and we are much open to welcome other virtues as hospitality, solidarity, interconnectedness, dia-logue, mutuality.

The Holy Spirit is working hard among us. The Spirit moves us towards deep and revolutionary transformation of our moral and ethical parameters. We are now aware that a good and holy woman or man is not the one who observes the old rules, but the one who is supportive, hospitable, free, open-minded, generous, the one who is trying to interpret and represent in her/his life the words of the Gospel. Religious life is today more human, more in context, more evangelical.

2.2. Towards a Deeper Configuration with Jesus

The Holy Spirit is the powerful energy of God and Jesus for innovation. If we are moved by the Spirit, we are unable to rest. The Spirit is the ongoing remembrance of Jesus and she carries out her mission offering us keys for an innovative way of following Jesus, our contemporary. The Spirit gives us no respite; she challenges us to reinterpret in each time and place the following of a contemporary Jesus. Consecrated life then becomes a “path,” an “itinerary,” a “process” of discipleship. We have rediscovered, then, the importance of formation itineraries.

From this evangelical and Christological perspective we rediscover the value of our Founders and their respective charism, not for themselves, but because in them we find the magnetism of Jesus, the only One for whom we give up our life. What we want is not to follow our Founders, but Jesus Christ. What we try in religious life is not to be consecrated persons, but to become simply Christians, disciples of Jesus and faithful people of God.

The Holy Spirit has led us to rediscover the mystery of the Eucharist. We are aware of being invited to the two tables: the table where the Word of God, the Bread of Heaven, is shared and the table of the Body and Blood of Jesus. The Eucharist, in the dynamic context of the liturgical year, becomes for us not a daily devotion as before, but the cornerstone and the center of our life and mission.

The Holy Spirit leads us to a new form of prayer. From her we have learned the way of prayer of the prophets, of the apostles, of the holy women and men. We pray with the psalms, with the hymns of the New and Old Testaments, with the innovative and revolutionary Spirit of the book of Revelation. Our prayer is now more biblical, a true answer to the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit leads us to a new relationship with power, money and sex. As followers of the humble Jesus and as the living memory of his option for the

least ones, we do not strive for power: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many” (Mt 20:26-28). We do not care about “having the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!” (Mt 12: 39), and we do not “like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces” (Mt 12:38). We have learned the art of living an ordinary and simple life, even as the clothes of ordinary people now become our habits, which are not signs of distinction or of different rank. We have repudiated to appear in the Church as those who strive after perfection, despising the “ordinary” Christians. We confess our sins, our shortcomings, and we renounce hypocrisy. Pharisaism is less tolerated among us than before. We renounce all kinds of religious violence; we have become more patient, more open to dialogue, and more understanding of our sisters and brothers who may be different from us.

Regarding sex, we recognize our weakness and limitations. We are not heroes, but like Jesus we try to master our sexuality and *keep our bodies as living sacrament of a covenant of love with God*. We condemn all kinds of sexual violence against children, against our sisters and brothers. We try to respect and honor the human body and its sexuality as sacred, as a divine mystery.

Money is for us only a means and not a god. We renounce the idolatry of money. We believe in the Providence of God, who is the Spirit. When the Spirit – some call her in these cases “Saint Joseph” – leads our economies, we become generous and people, in turn, are generous with us. The miracle of Providence happens.

We know that sex, money and power have two faces: the beautiful and angelic, and at the same time, the ugly and diabolical one. The evangelical counsels – the gifts of the Spirit are traditionally called “counsels”. They lead us to have and keep a sound relationship with power, sex and money, and thus avoid the horrible consequences of these forces when they become diabolical. In such a case, the images of the book of Revelation show us how beastly human behavior can turn into.

The Holy Spirit desires our conversion into a living memory of Jesus. We know that we cannot thus become as individuals, but as a body – of Jesus, that is, in community! We are members and parts of that one body. Only the whole body is called the Body of Jesus. It is beautiful to understand that religious and consecrated life is a journey that strives to be in communion with others to be the Body of Jesus, a collective biography of Jesus Christ, a living Christology, written by the Spirit.

Allow me, finally, to repeat that we are the memory of Jesus, not in view of the past, but interpreting the contemporaneity of Jesus. An obsolete memory of Jesus is irrelevant to our time. We have to discover the virtues that are more meaningful in our time and place. What has become obsolete and anachronistic in our societies is no longer the means chosen by the Spirit. We have to discover the means that are most significant and relevant for the contemporaneity of Jesus.

3. “COMMUNION OF THE SPIRIT” (*Koinonia Pneumatos*) (2 Cor 13:13)

In Indian theology, the Spirit as atman and advaita means “the unifying principle of the Godhead and therefore of the universe.” In our Christian revelation, the Holy Spirit is revealed as the Spirit of the new covenant, of communion. The Catholic ascetic Abhishiktananda described the Holy Spirit as “the advaita of God, the mystery of the non-duality of the Father and the Son.” The prophet Ezekiel envisions the Holy Spirit in this way:

“Then will I sprinkle clean (cleansed) water upon you, and you will be clean. From all your filthiness, I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new Spirit I will put within you. I will take away the stony heart from your flesh, and I will give you a fleshy heart. I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments” (Ez 36:25-27).

This is the Spirit of the new and everlasting covenant of God with his people. It is the Spirit that will be

“pour(ed) out on all flesh, so that sons and daughters will prophesy, old men will dream dreams and young people will see visions, and also on the servants and maidservants will be poured out in those days” (Joel 2:28-29).

This is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, the advaita of their own unity and oneness. This is the Spirit who was poured out on all the first male and female disciples gathered in assembly and on all flesh.

The Spirit is the meeting point, the access key, the mediation of the covenant, the power for communion. Where the Spirit is, there is communion, love and freedom.

Consecrated life has opened its doors and windows to the Holy Spirit of communion and covenant. The spiritual resources that consecrated life has are, mainly, resources for communion.

3.1. In the Framework of the Local Churches and Societies

I perceive that in today’s consecrated life there is a strong tendency toward

a more qualified community life and more open relationships with the local churches and with the society. Consequently, we become integrated into the life and mission of our parishes, dioceses and local churches. Things may not always go well, but an attempt toward such a direction is well worth our effort, specially so when this brings about greater awareness and the rediscovery of our being a living part of the framework of the Church and of our need to relate with other forms of Christian life.

When we as religious come together with other members of the people of God, we are ashamed of our superiority complex in the past, of the triumphalistic definition of religious life as the perfection, as a closer following of Jesus, as more radical, evangelical and prophetic way of life. But when we are alone, closed in our own spaces, isolated from the rest of the people of God, we allow ourselves to nurture our feeling of superiority, our self-satisfaction. In such a case, the lay people who work with us are kept in a state of dependency and subordination. Some theologies of religious life reflect this mentality of superiority and discrimination very well. Several official documents of the Church reflect this theology; it is only in some paragraphs of those documents that a new vision of communion is expressed as something parallel, yet not integrated in the whole document.

Nevertheless, the most beautiful experiences of religious life in our time are experiences of communion, dialogue, and insertion. When we are well integrated in the Body of the Church, then we acknowledge our deviations and errors and we realize that the stress we make in affirming our own identity is senseless; we find ourselves as simply members of the Church. The charisms belong to the Body. In the Church the charisms are valid and useful when they become humble service and not medals of prestige and privilege. Inserted in the Church our charisms become “Franciscan,” that is, dressed in the habit of “minority.”

The particular churches sometimes also become too closed in on themselves. They are not open to catholicity; they become selfish. When the clergy strives for power and control, they look at religious life as opponents, rivals or competitors. And the religious – especially the sisters and the brothers – feel that they are outsiders and foreigners in their own Church.

The universal and international nature of our institutes helps us to be present in a particular Church as pilgrims and non-residents. We are conscious that we stay in a particular Church as guests who enjoy its hospitality. Our belonging to a particular Church is weak and temporary. Our communities are provisional in the parish, in the diocese. We belong, above all, to the catholic and global Church.

Because of that, we have received the hallmark of “pontifical institutes.” In the particular Churches our presence is a reminder of the wholeness of the Church.

Day by day, we become more aware that our communion is not only with the Church, but also with the city. We are citizens. Citizenship more and more becomes a new name for communion, even in consecrated life. We try to become living members of the body of society. Inculturation is not only a missionary strategy, but a necessary characteristic of our spirituality of incarnation. The Holy Spirit leads us to greater participation in civil organizations, to a deeper integration in civil society. This is also the space not only for mission, but also for communion.

3.2. Consecrated life, “Catholic and Global”; Gift and Temptation

Let me to focus our attention on the essential note of the Church, which is “catholicity.” We have translated catholicity as “universality.” Nowadays it could be translated as “globality.”

A wrong way of understanding “catholicity” is to confuse catholicity with the neo-liberal globalization. In it the power of the economic and political center is spread over all. The result is a new form of colonialism and imperialism. What is only “one” among the others is presented as the only one for everybody, for all the people and countries. When catholicity is understood as universalism in analogy with the neo-liberal globalization, then the center of the Church – Rome – spreads its ideas, its power and decisions over all, and colonizes from a unique point of view. It is true that this point of view is wider, but not enough to respect the charismatic differences of all the particular Churches.

Though the empire recognizes differences, its purpose is to impose the unity that comes from the center. That model of globalization does not deserve the name “catholic.” In the time of the Fathers of the Church, catholicity never implied a decrease of the autonomy of particular Churches. There is, then, a model of catholicity or globalization that does not respect the dignity of persons and groups. The same happens oftentimes in pontifical institutes when superiors exercise power in this way. John Gray called this behavior of power “creative destruction.” New things are created at any price, destroying local projects or displacing them.

This happens when the Roman model of theology, law, liturgy, pastoral ministry are imposed on everyone. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, at first, was not intended to be imposed on everyone in the Church, but a first step to a later inculturated edition. But this second step never happened.

This is very different from our understanding of catholicity or globalization as solidarity, genuine communion, dialogue, integration of different peoples, countries, cultures, particular ways of living and acting as Church. This model of catholicity implies an on-going interchange, a genuine theological “perichoresis” between the world-Church and the particular Churches in a climate of brotherhood and sisterhood, of equality. In this model of catholicity no one is eliminated. In this model the Church is enriched with the gifts of all the peoples and cultures.

This is a synodal model of all the people journeying together.

The Holy Spirit is guiding religious life to this model of catholicity and globality. I have the experience of a religious life respectful of the cultural claims of different peoples and religions. At the same time, I perceive in the religious life of our days a sense of openness or catholicity that is pluricentric and not monocentric, that means that this new religious life is open not only to one religious center like Rome, but to others all over the world.

Now it is very normal and common to find in a continent religious men or women coming from different continents. Through them catholicity becomes real and practical.

3.3. Political Concern

The communion that the Spirit wants is not only within the Church. The Spirit is the principle of unity of the whole humankind. She is the source of unity and diversity.

When the Spirit becomes the moving principle of religious life, it is in confrontation with the political powers that discriminate, divide and subjugate people. When this happens, the religious cannot remain politically neutral and disengaged. Led by the Spirit, they become prophets of the main Gospel values of justice, peace, defense of nature. They also become defenders and protectors of the needy, the oppressed, the orphans and the widows. Then, religious persons become living icons of the Spirit, called by Jesus the “Paraclete.”

However, at the same time that religious life becomes older in some countries, it also becomes more conservative from a political point of view. Prophecy disappears and religious life loses its reason for being. If we are moved by the Spirit, how can we vote for, defend and support political forces that try to maintain a status quo that is clearly unjust and against the will of God? If religious life renounces political innovation, it renounces being moved by the Spirit

3.4. Where the Covenant is Renewed and is Alive...

The right way of understanding religious life is to consider it as a form of

living out the covenant of God with the whole humankind and of human beings with God, among themselves and with nature. It is a form of life at the service of this covenant. This is the path that the Holy Spirit offers us now.

There are alliances based on money, prestige and personal interest. There are other kinds of alliance based on mutuality, love, mutual respect and love. Religious of the covenant have a great appreciation for teamwork, community life, insertion among the people, especially the poor; they are women and men of dialogue, open to surprising encounters. These paths of covenant configure our lives.

4. SPIRITUS CREATOR ET CONSUMATOR

Where is the Spirit leading us? We can also give this answer: to become the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven like a beautiful Bride prepared for the Bridegroom.

The artists, moved by creative inspiration, give birth to beauty from nothingness and chaos, molded and shaped in thousands of ways. What is an artist without inspiration? Nothing! But inspiration is with us. Thousands of artists surprise us with amazing new creations. Through their work, the Spirit satisfies our hunger for beauty. The Spirit leads our history to redemption and perfection in an ongoing process of innovation and creativity. So the Spirit Creator also becomes the Spirit who brings everything to perfection (*Spiritus Consumator*).

Where is the Spirit leading us? I will focus my answer on three points: a) to creative imagination in the realm of theology, art and spirituality; b) to innovative models of institution, or refounding; c) to a regenerative therapy.

4.1. Creative Imagination

The innumerable artistic, philosophical and theological works of religious, not only in the past, but in the present as well are signs of the presence of the Spirit among us. Our artists and thinkers are not a threat to the living out of our charism or our mission. They are, on the contrary, a gift though the creative process may not allow them to lead a regular way of life. When inspiration comes, it comes! They are not bad religious. They are artists, thinkers, contemplatives, poets! Someday our congregations will be proud of them because they have inspired new symbols, new ideas and perspectives.

Creative imagination works also in the field of missionary activities. Our apostolate needs a lot of imagination so that it may not degenerate into routine and loss of efficiency. The charism of hospitality, or catechetical evangelization, or compassion has to be translated into new languages, significant actions, challenging institutions. In all these aspects the “*Spiritus Creator*” is obeyed.

The care for creative imagination enlarges the space of our tent and fortifies our capacity of seduction and attraction. Religious life becomes beautiful. Beauty will save the world.

4.2. Refounding of our Institutions

Years ago the famous German theologian Johann Baptist Metz envisioned the need for the Church of new institutions. He distinguished two kinds of institutions: those of the “first order” and those of the “second order.” The first ones are those institutions in which the most important and relevant is always what the institution is and requires. In these kinds of institutions individuals are often sacrificed for the institution. The second ones are those kinds of institutions wherein the person, creativity and imagination, are the most important and relevant aspects. Structures are flexible and not rigid. Everything can be changed during the process because these institutions are at the service of life, and life is movement and surprise. The freedom of faith is embodied in those institutions of the “second order.” Metz was not against institutions. He had recognized that they are absolutely necessary. However, his question was: What kind of institutions?

These past several years, we, religious, have been in the process of reforming of our institutions. I perceive, however, that our institutions continue to be institutions of the “first order,” though updated. The language is new, but the way of functioning remains that of the old one. We find it too hard to carry out the requirements of updating our institutions: so many meetings, excessive consultations and formalities. At the end, everything is like the way it was before!

The challenge is to create new institutions of the “second order” – is this not where the Holy Spirit leads us?

Attentive to the Spirit who is alive in the signs of the times and places, we will find the institutional solutions we need for our mission and our way of life.

The Holy Spirit will lead us to new forms of understanding the centripetal and centrifugal dimensions of our life, the connection between action, passion and contemplation... The two icons of consecrated life, the Samaritan woman and the good Samaritan, become for us a serious critique of the institutions of the “first order” and a serious commitment to create institutions in which God is manifested as Spirit and compassionate love.

The different experiences in the institutional field of formation are, in my opinion, the best milieu for formative institutions of the “second order.” There we can envision where the Spirit is leading us. When the person of the formandi

is the focus of everything... there is the Spirit. In any case, I believe that in these years, with good will we have created a formation system that many times suffers from “obesity.” Our formandi are subjected to a lot of activities, studies, celebrations that do not enable them to find the necessary tranquility they need for personalization and internal growth. Sometimes our formators lack formative imagination. Formation then becomes sad, boring, and irrelevant. This is perhaps the reason why formators and formandi prefer to escape often from formation centers, which turn out to be unbearable.

4.3. Regenerative Therapy

In the beginning, monastic life was considered a form of life with “therapeutic” capacities. The monks were even called “therapeutics of the desert.” The monastic experience became for not a few women and men their best anthropological therapy.

If we grow in our increasing conviction about the unity of the human, spiritual and corporeal being, this understanding brings us to the conclusion that the healing of all our illnesses do not take place only in one dimension of our being, rather it has to take place harmoniously in all the dimensions of our being human.

Monastic life has been an integral therapy not only for our soul, but also for our body. In his work “*Vita Antonii*,” Saint Athanasius recognizes how ascetic life has so positively affected the body of the old man, Abbot Anthony, who, already in his very old age, became the cause of admiration among those who saw him when he visited Alexandria. They were surprised by his balance, energy, and his corporal beauty.

The great monk Evagrius introduced in the desert an authentic spiritual therapy for the monks. Given his profound knowledge of the human being, he worked out therapeutic ways to overcome negative tendencies, capital sins or bad thoughts, or interior demons, which were authentic regenerating therapies.

But it is not necessary to go to the origins of consecrated life. Consecrated life today is discovering a spirituality appropriate to our time. In this spirituality the corporal, the animic, the psychological and the spiritual are taken into consideration. Spirituality today is much more integral and integrative: it affects the soul and the body, the individual and the community, the community and the society, ethics and the esthetics, esthetics and dietetic. It is a way to understand life with its rhythms of silences, of desert, of withdrawal, and, at the same time, with its generous activity, thus creating a fantastic balance in human life.

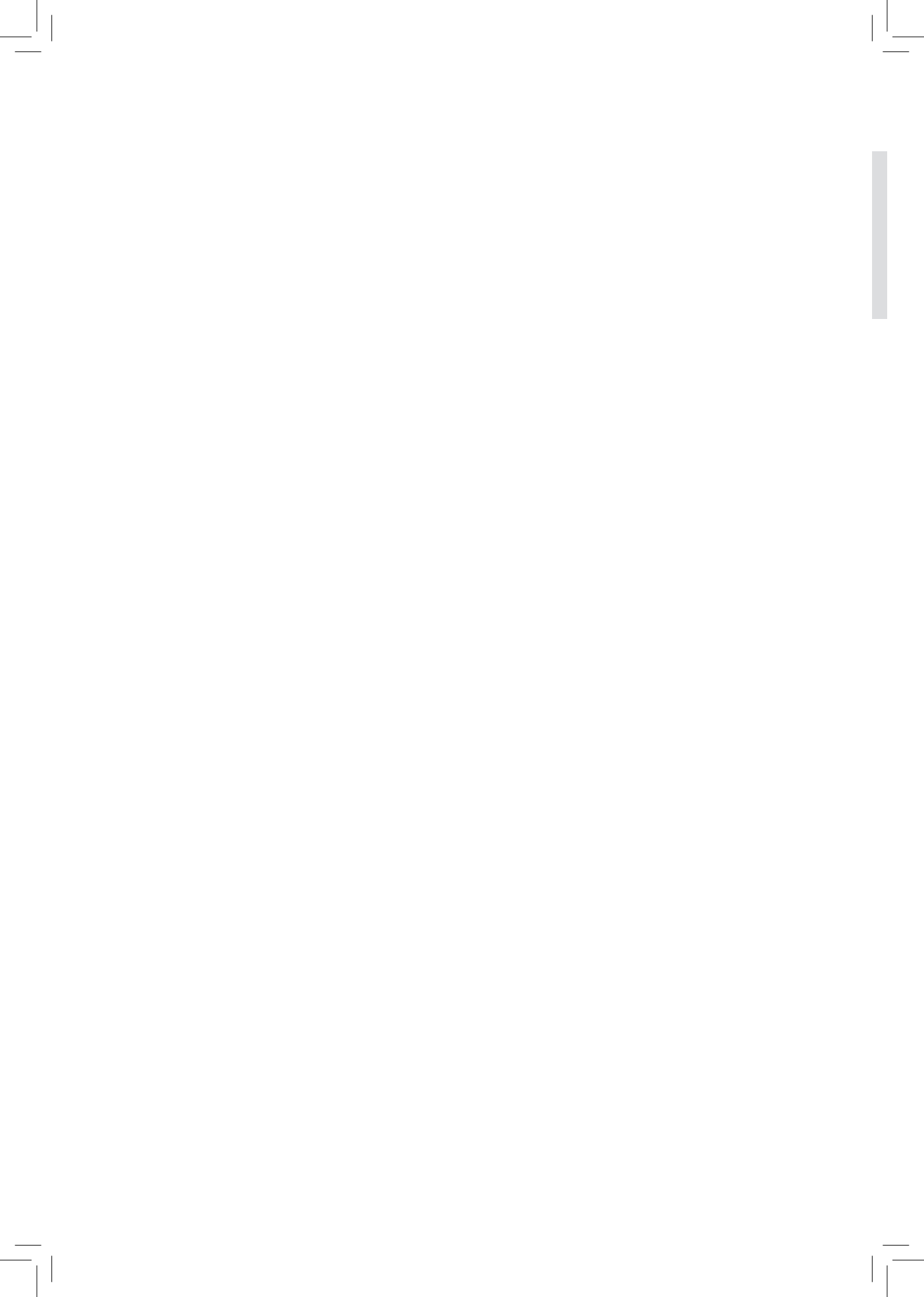
It is also stressed today how prayer, the recitation of the Psalms and the celebration of the sacramental rituals create situations of fecundity and vitality for humans.

Consecrated life, moved by the Spirit, is discovering that it has some sort of a maternal function in relation to human beings. The Asian bishops have called on consecrated life for several times to exercise a function of “spiritual paternity and maternity” among the peoples of Asia.

CONCLUSION

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to Consecrated Life. We are not in the worst of times. Consecrated life continues to grow in the global level.

However our time is becoming a decisive time. We have to make serious and wise decisions. These are times for enthusiasm, not for lamentations. The Spirit moves our sailboat while the strong currents try to change our direction. However, we see clearer. We have a better intuition of where we are going. We hear the voice of the Spirit, even if we are unable to see her. Jesus and his angel are telling us: “*Let anyone who has an ear listen – that means, obey! – what the Spirit is saying to consecrated life.*”



CENTRALITY OF CHRIST, THE *WORD MADE FLESH* IN THE LIFE OF THE RELIGIOUS

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

It is always good to ask the basic question: what are we after in religious life? What is its focus? Recently, I happened to watch a movie, titled, “A Nun’s Story.” A young girl, so sincere and passionate about serving God, joins a convent. In the beginning itself, the formator gave her the rule and told her that if wants to become a nun, she must follow the rule strictly. The poor girl tried with all her heart to follow the rule very strictly in every circumstance. In spite of all her efforts, she found herself, at times, failing to abide by the rule. She gradually arrived at a conclusion that she was unworthy to be in religious and that she did not have a vocation to religious life. The result was that she finally left the convent.

The problem was a certain understanding of religious life prevalent at that time, which unfortunately, the formators mediated to her. She was offered an ideal and was taught to relate to an ideal and not to the person of Christ of the Gospel, the “Good news of God to humanity.”¹

My intention in this article, is only to give you a framework for understanding the Word of God and also to show how Christ, the *Eternal Word Made Flesh* becomes the central concern in our life and mission as Religious. As Religious in the heart of the Church, it is good that we deepen our *sentire cum ecclesia* especially as the Church has initiated a process to revive herself on the theme “the Word of God.”² I hope that these reflections will be amplified and deepened by the readers with their own expertise and contributions from other sources.

1. GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE IN COMMUNICATING HIMSELF

The Second Vatican Council masterfully and accurately set forth in *Dei Verbum* a summary of the faith professed by the Church throughout the ages.

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It is that God in his goodness and wisdom chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will. He makes himself “known in a gratuitous and direct way so as to enter into an interpersonal relationship of truth and love with humankind and the world he created. God reveals himself in the visible realities of the cosmos and history “through deeds and words having an inner unity,” thereby demonstrating an “economy of Revelation,” namely, a plan which seeks the salvation of humankind and, through it, all creation.³ At one and the same time, this revelation communicates the truth about God, One in Three, and the truth about humanity, loved by God and destined for eternal happiness.

This gratuitous communication, which presupposes a deep communion analogous to human intimacy, is characterized by God himself and his Word, that is, what *Lineamenta* calls, the “Word of God.” It is a “personal act of the Trinitarian God, who loves and consequently ‘speaks.’ God speaks to humankind so that each person might acknowledge his love and respond to him.”⁴ Bible, in its entirety, clearly demonstrates that this communication has continually taken place from Genesis to Revelation. When the Word of God is read and proclaimed, the Lord himself makes an appeal to us to become part of a deeply profound and uniquely interpersonal event of communion between him and us and each of us with one another.

2. WORD GOD: THE SOURCE OF ALL REALITY

This self-revealing and communicating Word of God is the source of all reality. God spoke and everything came in to being. God said: “Let there be... and there was” (Gen 1.1f). “He commanded and things sprang in to being” (Ps 33:9). We read in the prologue of St. John: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. Everything that came into being, came into being through the word. Nothing that exist, exist without him” (Jn 1:1f). Truly, the Word of God is active and accomplishes what it aims (cf. Is 55:10; Heb 4:12).

Once this word has rung in the midst of the world, in eternity, in fullness of time, it is so powerful that it applies to everyone, addresses everyone all with equal directness. No body is in a disadvantageous position either in space, or in distance or in time (Mt 13:3f; Lk 11:28).

The Eternal Word of God, however, is always mediated to us in particularities. The immediacy of the word is experienced thorough these mediations. God speaks in the sanctuaries of the universe, cosmos, history and humanity in all its micro and macro-cosmic epiphanies. These are all “words of God” in their multiple and varied forms in their complexity and utter simplicity. So the Word

of God is endowed with different forms. In this context, it is worth mentioning the expression of St. Bonnaventure “*liber naturae, liber scripturae and liber vitae*,” the book of nature, of scripture and of life. There is God’s word in the people, events and things of our life even as He reveals himself in “burning bush” (Ex 3:1f.) or in the manger (Lk 2:2f)

3. HUMANS: CALLED TO BE “HEARERS” OF GOD’S WORD

Thus for our sake, God has spoken first, and he invites us to enter into communion with him. For the moment, we can only be listeners. We have to begin first of all by listening. And we are all called to be hearers of the word. God has created us in such a way that we have an existential ability to hear the word of God. Han Urs Balthazar says: “God, in giving us faith, has also given us the ability to hear.”⁵ To believe and to hear him is one and the same thing. “The obedience of God is owed to the God who reveals.”⁶ A person is to listen to the One who gives through speaking, “freely surrendering his entire self”⁷ To believe is to recognize and accept our estrangement from God, and it is only in this recognition that we recognize our ability to listen to his word. It is only in this listening that God further enables us to respond, and in responding, he takes us to communion with himself. Thus any dialogue with God, any communion with him is possible only on the basis of his word, his speaking, his language. *Lineamenta* states: “The Human Person Needs Revelation.”⁸

Allowing oneself to be “touched” by God’s Word can open a person to the Word of God in all its signs and languages. “Through the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, the Word communicates truth to faith by means of a teaching or doctrinal formula. It recognizes that the Word is the basic force at work in conversion; a light in response to the many questions in the believer’s life; a guide to a proper and wise discernment of reality; an invitation not simply to read or speak the Word but to ‘do it’ (Lk 8:21); and finally, an everlasting source of consolation and hope.”⁹ From this follows, the task of acknowledging and ensuring the primacy of the Word of God in the life of believers by receiving it as the community of faith that proclaims it, understands it, explains it and lives it.

Even though we are capable of knowing God by relying simply on God-given human resources (cf. *Rom* 1:20), in various circumstances in history, as a result of sin, this knowledge of God has become clouded and uncertain and even denied by many. But God does not abandon humanity; he puts a deep longing in individuals for light, salvation and peace, even if this is not always recognized.

4. CHRIST-EVENT: THE CLASSICAL LOCUS OF GOD'S WORD

Perhaps, this explains why God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, who becomes the “Word Made Flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14), thereby becoming the fullness of God’s revelation. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God ... upholding the world by his word of power” (Heb 1:1-3). Jesus Christ, therefore, comes as the fullness of God’s word. Central to all the privileged places of God’s speaking, stands the Christ-Event, which becomes for a Christian, the classical and normative locus of God’s word. “For he sent his Son, the Eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that he might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God” (cf. *Jn* 1:1-18). “Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word-Made-Flesh, was sent as ‘a man to men.’ He ‘speaks the words of God’ (*Jn* 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. *Jn* 5:36; 17:4).”¹⁰ Therefore, through his life, words and deeds, Jesus took upon himself and fulfilled the entire purpose, meaning, history and plan of the Word of God. His reveals and makes plain God’s manner of thinking, loving and acting to humanity.

All the “words of God” uttered in cosmos, history and humanity, therefore, stand in relation to the classical, normative and privileged locus of God’s speaking which is the Christ-Event. The Scriptures, being the recorded expressions of this Christ-event, and especially the Gospels which are “the heart of all the Scriptures” become the normative sacrament for divine speaking in the life of a Christian.¹¹ It is the Christ-event that provides us with the criteria of the Kingdom within which all our listenings, perceptions, evaluations, decisions, actions and relations are to be judged.

It is no wonder then in what John the evangelist wrote: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:1-4).

5. UNDERSTANDING THE WORD IN ITS RICHNESS

Pastorally speaking, this truth calls for an understanding on how to gather the various meanings of the Word of God in the centrality of the Christ-event.

This is why Lineamenta speak of the Word of God as a “symphony played with many instruments.”¹² We see in the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is shown to be the Eternal Word of God, “which shines forth in creation, is given a historical character in the message of the prophets, is fully manifested in the Person of Jesus, is echoed in the voice of the apostles and is proclaimed in the Church today. In a general sense, the Word of God is Christ-the-Word, who, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the key to all interpretation.”¹³ Origen also states: “The Word of God, who was in the beginning with God, is not, in his fullness, much talk or a multiplicity of words; but a single Word, which embraces a great number of ideas (*theoremata*), each of which is a part of the Word in its entirety... and if Christ refers us to the Scriptures in testifying to himself, it is not to one book that he sends us to the exclusion of another, but to all, because all speak of him.”¹⁴

The essence of the Church’s proclamation is this richness of the Word in its various forms. The more the Church knows to understand herself in Jesus Christ, greater will be her renewal by the Word of God. However, it is also true that the Word of God (which is Jesus) has also to be understood, as he himself said, “according to the Scriptures” (*Lk 24:44-49*).

We need to be vigilant in arriving at a proper conception of the Word of God by avoiding erroneous or over-simplistic approaches and any ambiguity. We need to perceive the Word of God in its symphony because of its “intrinsic connection to the mystery of the Trinitarian God and his Revelation; its manifestation in the world of creation; its germinal presence in the life and history of humanity; its supreme expression in Jesus Christ; its infallible confirmation in Sacred Scripture and its transmission in the living Tradition of the Church.”¹⁵ Because of its richness also comes the necessary and demanding task of interpreting the word of God in the Church.

6. CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE CENTRALITY OF THE WORD MADE FLESH

Consecrated life, from its origins, beginning with the eremitical form, and in all its successive forms have emerged from a life lived familiarity with the Word of God in all its richness and, more centrally, with the Christ-Event. Down the centuries, the Gospel – as it were, the supreme rule of consecrated life – has continued to inspire it and, in turn, is called to refer constantly to the Gospel, to remain alive and fertile, bearing fruit for the salvation of souls. Hence, consecrated men and women are expected to view the divine scriptures as the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil 3.8). The instruction *Starting*

Afesh from Christ recalls: “It was the Holy Spirit who sparked the Word of God with new light for the Founders and Foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it.”¹⁶ Every religious family is born which with its very presence becomes in turn a living “exegesis” of the Word of God. The Second Vatican Council says that the succession of charisms in the consecrated life can therefore be read as an unfolding of Christ down the ages, as a living Gospel that is actualized in ever new forms.¹⁷ “Deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord,” consecrated life can be compared to a “plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church’s life. What an extraordinary richness!”¹⁸ It is therefore, the special duty of consecrated life “to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel.”¹⁹ By doing so, their witness imbues the Church with a “much needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the Gospel”²⁰ and indeed, we might say, with an “eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel.”²¹

6.1. Conformity with Christ-the Word: The Heart of Consecration

This is simply because vocation to consecrated life has no other goal than that of becoming conformed with Christ Jesus. “In consecrated life, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one’s whole heart, of loving him ‘more than father or mother, more than son or daughter’ (Mt 10:37) – for this is required of every disciple – but of living and expressing this by *conforming one’s whole existence to Christ* in an all-encompassing commitment.”²² By embracing the evangelical counsels, we commit ourselves to making “our own – in chastity, poverty and obedience – the way of life practiced personally by Jesus and proposed by him to his disciples.”²³ We are called not only to make Christ the whole meaning of our lives, but strive to reproduce in ourselves, as far as possible, “that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world.”²⁴ God the Father has chosen us so that we may make our own the *forma Christi* (cf. Rom 13:14; Jn 6:7); so that we might be conformed with the traits of Jesus and that His own creation plan might come to fullness in us. The “form” of Christ must become our “form.” “It is a ‘form’ that conforms; it is a ‘figure’ that configures. It has such a power of fascination and allure that enchants, seduces and transforms us.”²⁵

We are called to place the *Word made flesh* at the center of all things. We must learn to walk, fixing our “our gaze on Christ radiant face.”²⁶ By growing in conformity with Christ and reincarnating his life vision and mission contextually, meaningfully and relevantly, consecrated life becomes “a sign and parable of God’s Kingdom” which alone is the “central motive of the expectation and

preaching of Jesus.”²⁷ “The diverse forms of religious life exercise among the People of God this admirable function as signs, as parables of the dynamic presence of God in the world, within the Great Sign and Parable which is the Church.”²⁸

Our following of Jesus and conformity with him constitute a unity. Jesus is “our way,” and there cannot be any other way, even though there are many offered by the world today. We know him and confess him by following him. The truth of our confession lies in the radicality of our following. We, religious are called, “to speak of Jesus Christ in the Church and in the world, by narrating, in our own lives, our own stories of following Him. The religious man or woman should be a person who is at every moment holding on to the Word of the Lord and who is always on the road, who like a good disciple imitates Him in his poverty, virginity, obedience and meekness, and is being mystically conformed to Him, to the point that the Spirit of Christ comes to possess him totally.”²⁹

6.2. Charism: A Spirit-Filled Way of Encountering and Serving the Word

Charisms of Religious Institutes emerge from the ways in which the founders and foundresses have encountered Word of God as manifested in the Christ-event. These men and women were fascinated by the person of Christ and felt deeply the ramifications of his life in their hearts. Because of their faithful contemplation of the Gospels and deep sensitivity their own social milieu, they felt the Christ-event, not just as a historical event in the world’s past, but as a dynamic reality penetrating, subsuming the present, challenging to both mysticism and social action. Their following of Christ, therefore, had also elements that are both mystical (rooted in contemplative vision) and political (overflowed into expressions of love).

They saw areas of human life where there was a crying need for the Christ-story to be retold. They went into the dark places of human existence, its brokenness, poverty, illness, ignorance, degradation, misery, telling the story in words of proclamation and deeds of compassion.

It is good to remember that it was the Word of God that became the ultimate means for them to perceive the whisperings of God in the brokenness of the human reality which, in turn, became the means for them to interpret the Word of God. It is this Word of God that led them live as renewed and adapted persons. It is because of this transparency for the adaptation and renewal, that they remain effective and inspiring for our congregations.

By this God experience of being listeners of God from the Word of God, they remind and challenge us not to copy what they did but to live what they lived

in creative fidelity. This is the call to convert their spirit as our heritage and prophecy by which we become the witnesses for the Lord.

6.3. Variety from the Richness of the Word and the Variety of its Experience

The variety of the Charisms emerges from the richness of the Word of God and the variety of its experiences and expressions. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn 1:1-3; cf. Col 1:16). The Mystery of the Word, with various nuances and a significant variety of aspects, thus, got personified in Christ of the Gospels and in his words and deeds, manifesting more clearly those innumerable dimensions of the Word. Each of the founders/foundresses was attracted and motivated by certain aspects of the mystery of Christ and re-lived and expressed these aspects in tune with what they experienced. This experience and expression, therefore, become the foundation for the spirituality and mission of each congregation. It is significant to remember that the vocational roots of their call are in the Gospels. The Christ-story, thus, with its enormous range and depth, were dealt with by focusing on particular aspects and got reflected in the social milieu in which the founders lived.

The Lord who called them spoke to them both from the gospel or Bible as well as from the reality. The historical context and the human situation were the practical realities of the Word of God. Since they were keen listeners to the Word of God, they could grasp at once the call of God. No authentic founder is exception to this fact of being an ardent listener of the Word God in their internal self and in the human and social realities. This capacity to listen to God both in their hearts and in the heart of the social reality produces in them an irruption of the Holy Spirit. This strong irresistible movement is the origin of their call to form a community for a particular way of life to live that special mystery of Jesus and to do the apostolate in that light.

6.4. Listening to the Word: The Constant Source of Nourishment

If we have to keep our gaze fixed on Christ, imitate him and grow in conformity with him, there is no way other than that of reading, listening to, meditating and embodying the Word in our life. It is this ongoing contemplation that will gradually and slowly transform us into him; the vision of the light makes us more and more luminous. This process is such that it can at length reach the point where “it is no longer we who live, but Christ who truly lives in us” (Gal 2:20). Pope John Paul II insists: “It is necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life giving encounter..., which draws from the biblical text the

living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.”³⁰ Jesus, the creative and redemptive Word of the Father, endowed with the full power of the Spirit, has an unimaginable power for transformation. “This Word created the world. This Word created the people of God. This Word has created the great vocations in the Church. This Word keeps on re-creating us, transforming us inwardly, even at times when we do not perceive it. The Word of God on our lips is the most effective weapon in order to battle against the rule of evil one and to make the Kingdom emerge.”³¹

6.5. Formation in and for the Word: An Indispensable Ground

If this is so, *formation in and for the Word* is an indispensable ground for our life and mission as Religious in the Church. By this, I do not mean, just imparting the informational knowledge of the Scriptures, which, of course, is important. Today, however, information on anything is available on our finger tips through our effective net work systems. Thanks to our modern technology. By *formation in and for the Word*, I do mean a teaching and learning on how to listen first to God’s own word and make all our other listenings **subservient** to this primordial listening. One might ask why this is so important. This is because when we listen, we hear not only the word of God but also the voices that come from too many other sources especially in the present world governed more by “information explosion.” When we try to listen, we hear ordinarily too many voices, all mixed up and confused, even voices that contradict the voices of God. All kinds of human “isms” also speak each with its own language and expertise and area of knowledge. Sometimes, God’s word is subsumed under all these voices. His directives co-exist with many other directives. We are being bombarded with directives that are both consonant and dissonant. This is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, especially in a world governed more by media revolution and globalization, remote-controlled by systems collective global power and vested interests. In the past, at least, distinctions between good and clear were finely demarcated and so it was easy to recognize good and evil. The modern situation, when it comes to this recognition, can be very confusing and alarming.

Because of this, formation must help tune ourselves properly, discern, and develop the art of disciplined listening or contemplative listening through which we let ourselves be addressed by God’s own word. It means a willingness to subject ourselves, our motivations, perceptions, decisions, judgments, relationships, possessions, positions and, in fact, our entire life-world under the all pervading horizon of God’s word. It means to be open to the “sharpness” of His word, “piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and

discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12); it means, not only to be affirmed, cared, loved, accepted, but also to be challenged, confronted, and renewed personally by God’s word. This is, in fact, the essence of being in continual prayer.

Being in continual prayer and growth in prayer, therefore, could involve a breaking and burning of the idols of our inner sanctuary, including the idol of our own ego. “We all have an alter set up in our hearts. The problem is, that the god of our alter, the god we really adore, is our own ego. Perhaps we set up a few little idols alongside it, provided they harmonize with the main idolatrous image of our own ego. This inner idol of ours demands its worship, its liturgy.”³² The formation in and for the Word, must accompany the process of purification of the hearts from these idols of our inner sanctuary, both in initial and ongoing formation of the religious men and women.

6.6. Lectio Divina: The Most Effective Method

It is because of this reason that *Lectio divina* or Divine reading in all its five stages (Preparation, Reading, Mediation, Prayer and Contemplation) has been considered as the most basic method that has been foundational to Christian practice even from the early Church and continues to remain as a classical method of *formation in and for the Word*, giving rise to “fervor in contemplation and the ardor of apostolic activity.”³³ Even the study of the Scriptures has been inspired by *Lectio divina*. It is also considered as the springboard or the source from which all forms of prayer emerge.

6.7. Lived Familiarity with the Word: A Protection from Reductionism

Another important aspect of this formation is attaining a *lived familiarity* with the Scriptures, resulting in a personally digested wisdom of the Scriptures. It means an “in-touchness” with the mysterious story of how we have been claimed, redeemed and invited into the intimacy by the Holy Other—a deep intuitive grasp of how, in the past, this Holy Other has initiated covenants with persons and with groups. It means an interiorized awareness of the content of those covenants and the immediacy of the implications in one’s life. Speaking of this, John Paul II writes: “From familiarity with God’s Word... they acquire a *kind of supernatural intuition*, which allows them to avoid being conformed to the mentality of this world, but rather to be renewed in their own mind, in order to discern God’s will about what is good, perfect and pleasing to him.”³⁴ Such a lived familiarity will liberate us from reducing the word in a selective and impoverished reading of it; of taking in a reduced, monotonous and unbalanced nourishment from it by resorting to an excessively selective way of reading. Hence the ongoing

contemplation, the “gaze fixed on Christ,” gradually and slowly transforms us into him; the vision of that light makes us more and more luminous. This process could be such that it reaches the point where “it is no longer we who live, but Christ who truly lives in us” (Gal 2:20).

This is why the Constitution *Dei Verbum* asks us to read and meditate on the Word, taking into account the unity of the entirety of the Scriptures which forms, so to speak, an admirably symphonic and many-colored whole.³⁵ “Only the totality of it offers the complete sense of the Word of God. Only by discovering the effects that this totality produces in believers can we understand the ultimate intentionality of the Word of God.”³⁶

CONCLUSION

To be nourishing ourselves with the Word in order to be “servants of the Word” in the work of evangelization should become a priority for us as consecrated men and women. This is a matter of urgency. Let me conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI on February 2, on the World Day of Consecrated Life, addressed to the Consecrated: “Nourish your day with prayer, meditation and listening to the Word of God. May you who are familiar with the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, help the faithful appreciate it in their daily lives too. And may you know how to express what the Word suggests, letting yourself be formed by it so that you bring forth abundant fruit, like a seed that has fallen into good soil.”³⁷

Endnotes

1. Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris, The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, XIII Ordinary General Assembly (Vatican City: 2012), 24-38.
2. I am referring particularly to the XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that has taken place in Rome from 5th to the 26th October 2008 on the theme “*The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*” and the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict VI, *Verbum Domini* (Rome: 2010)
3. Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, (Rome: 1965), 2, hereafter abbreviates as *DV*.
4. Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta, The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.*” XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod , (Rome: 2008), 6.
5. Hans Urs von Balthazar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 33.
6. *DV*. 5
7. *DV*. 5
8. *Lineamenta*, 7.
9. *Lineamenta*, 11.

10. *Lineamenta*, 9.
11. *DV*, 18.
12. *Lineamenta* speaks of six fold analogous meanings of the Word of God, 10.
13. *Lineamenta*, 9.
14. *In Ioannem* V, 5-6: SC 120, 380-384.
15. *Lineamenta*, 9.
16. Congregation for Instituitues of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, (Rome: 2002), 24.
17. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. 46.
18. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (Rome: 1996), 1 & 5.
19. *VC*, 33.
20. *VC*, 3.
21. *VC*, 25.
22. *VC*, 16.
23. *VC*, 31.
24. *LG*, 44.
25. Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Conformity with Jesus, Vol. 8: Theology of Religious Life* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005), 7.
26. *VC*, 14.
27. John M. Lozano, *Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, (Chicago, IL: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1980), 25.
28. Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Foundation, Charismatic Roots and Identity, Vol. 9: Theology of Religious Life* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005), 26.
29. Paredes, *Conformity with Jesus*, 2.
30. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 39.
31. Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Prayer in Religious Life, Vol. 4: Theology of Religious Life* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005), 15-16.
32. Paredes, *Conformity with Jesus*, 23.
33. *VC*, 94.
34. *VC*, 94.
35. *DV*. 12.
36. Christo Rey, *Prayer in Religious Life*, 15.
37. From the address to the Consecrated Men and Women, given by Pope Benedict XVI on February 2, 2008, on the World Day of Consecrated Life in Rome.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSECRATED LIFE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ASIA

Lode Wostyn, CICM

A teacher of theology has to wrestle from time to time with Church documents. It means entering into an esoteric world in which patriarchs throw around with terms like Icon of the Trinity, paschal mystery, eschatological, apocalyptic, messianic and many more. An ordinary mortal has no idea what these documents are all about. Why when the Church's message is so liberating, does it so often fail to convert and convince? Cardinal Daly, in a lecture at the St. Mary's College in London, gave the answer to this question. "There is a constant temptation to present the Christian ideal as if it is synonymous with the real, and if the case of the ideal made it unnecessary to scrutinize the actual"¹. The main offender in this, according to the commentator of Daly's lecture, is the Roman Curia, which unleashes a weekly torrent of abstractions, barely touching the earth.

I did some tedious reading of the torrent of Roman documents on consecrated life. They require from the reader a lot of patience because they often contain a chain of quotations of the authorities. A short document of 20 pages has 100 footnotes.² It looks as if the authors are not supposed to think for themselves. The authorities of the past have already said everything. The working paper "With a Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity" came then as a surprise because I felt addressed by its reflection. How come? Most documents depart from above, from truths that are contained in the tradition. John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, for example, starts from the dazzling heights of the Trinitarian mystery which has then to be reflected in the life of the evangelical counsels. Contemplative theological minds may feel at home in this world of theological speculation. Other theological minds, however, influenced by the Latin American theologians who found their inspiration in the work of Cardinal Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers, prefer something more down to earth. Their reflection on Christian life follows a spiral in which in a first step,

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they look “at the reality that challenges us”, bring this reality in a second step in dialogue with our Christian tradition for “enlightenment”, and conclude with a reflection “toward action”. I quoted the titles of the three parts of the working paper “With Passion...” It opted for the “see-discern-act” method, called the “reflection-action spiral” by the Asian Bishops who adopted this methodology for their own faith reflection on the Asian realities.³

My task in this article is to elaborate on the first step of the reflection-action spiral and to do some “seeing”: what are the realities that challenge the religious in a global world and in Asia? Seeing is a dangerous activity, especially in political or religious authoritarian societies, which expect people to follow and to obey. Our societies in Asia are authoritarian. Our churches and religious institutes are part of this world and may have dished out doctrinal and legal frameworks that require unquestionable allegiance. Jose Maria Escriba describes in *The Way* an ideal that continues to be practiced by some religious: “Obedience, the sure way. Blind obedience to your superior the way of sanctity. Obedience in your apostolate, the only way: for, in a work of God, the spirit must be to obey or to leave.”⁴ Blind religious are not supposed to see “the reality that challenges us.” It becomes very boring. The Union of Superiors General are apparently of another opinion and invite us to look at our reality at this moment of history in order to read the sign of the times, to discover the new wells and new paths of an emerging consecrated life. If we trust our experience, we may see “a process of newness in which we are involved.” The word “new” is somehow the recurring theme of the working paper. What is then so new? In a first part of my reflection I comment on the new reality described in the paper. This will be followed by some considerations on the challenges and opportunities of this new reality for Consecrated Life in Asia.

1. SEEING THE WORLD AND ASIA

1.1. The Overarching Experience of our Time: Change

During the last fifty years of the 20th century humanity experienced a greater change than in the whole millennium. Change keeps happening in a constantly faster pace. In the Philippines, and this is true for most of the other Asian countries, we can make a travel through time. In rural areas, life continues in the traditional way. In the cities, we enter in another world. Makati in Manila is a shopping, office and trade center that could be situated in any other part of the world. Marilyn Ferguson, in a standard reference work *The Aquarian Conspiracy*⁵, points to the different areas of life that are undergoing a paradigmatic change and can only be described in terms of a New Age breaking in upon us. We witness

a new understanding of the human brain and consciousness, an expanded scientific knowledge of the cosmos, new developments in government, economy, education, medicine, and religion.

We can illustrate these paradigmatic changes by looking at our own experiences. Many of us have still known the horse carriage that is now a tourist attraction in Manila. Today we travel by speed train and airplanes, and space travel is coming. Being sick we were brought to the house of the village doctor or to the local healer. Today we may have to enter into a high-tech hospital where scanners deliver the diagnosis. We relied on books for enriching our knowledge. Today we are in the age of instant information via computer and websites. The Philippines is the country of cellphones that report all our movements. A priest guided a group of Filipino pilgrims in the city of Rome. To his great astonishment, he observed that the seeing of tourist spots was registered on cellphones and immediately reported to family and friends. It was tourism by cellphone. *FABC 5* describes Asia as living in a time of extraordinary change and desire for change. “Change is the most constant factor in our societies” (no.2.1.3.)⁶

The changes taking place in the world have deeply affected the traditional inner-working of the Church. The Church is in turmoil. After Vatican II Council, the Western Church became for the first time a World Church, formed by the communion of local churches. This change brings along many issues: the image of the male-celibate priesthood is questioned, laity and women get the center stage in the life of the Church, religious institutes in the Western world are in decline, traditional morality is rejected, spirituality searches for new sources in the religions of the East, the Catholic Church is challenged by other churches and the world religions, and so on. Our Roman authorities often try to remove some of these issues from the agenda of the local churches, and yet these issues will not go away. The recent Synod of Asia, and the other continental synods, have been frustrating experiences. Many proposals made by the Asian Bishops disappeared in a final document which basically became a papal exhortation bereaved of these concrete suggestions. One commentator ascribed this disappearance to the Roman computers that automatically remove all progressive ideas. Our Church is part of a process of radical change, yet it is apparently a slow and painful process to transform a strongly centralized Roman Church into a communion of local churches. The idea of communion is present in recent Church documents, but it is sealed within a flowery abstract theological language that directs us to the higher regions of the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The whole world order, including the Church, is in a process of dramatic transition and revision. This process is unlike previous periods of change in

human history in two ways. First, changes are more rapid and immediate than previous ages ever imagined they could be. Secondly, a new assumption has entered into human consciousness that such rapid change will be normative for life. We will never again settle into stable, well defined social patterns that will remain unchallenged for a long period of time. From unchanging truths and laws as the rule, we move to “change is the rule.” We are indeed in a fascinating and challenging time of newness.

1.2. The Energy Field of Change: Globalization

What brings about these changes. Many new forces in our world are linked together in what has been called the phenomenon of globalization. The working paper gives a brief description of some aspects of the fact that “we are dwellers in a global and planetary world.” I elaborate on this description. The exchanges between humans on the economic, informative, technological and cultural levels are accelerating and intensifying in such a way that our globe is being reduced to one market and one interrelated, socio-economic-political and cultural entity. We get a global society that is a sort of network in which all societies of the world are tied up with one another. The dominant thread of this network is, no doubt, economic liberalization. Producers and investors in a liberal capitalistic system behave as if the world economy consists of only a single area of production and one business place, instead of having to deal with national economies. This economic situation is made easier by developments in other areas. Let me mention five other threads in the network. First, in politics, we move towards a world community with the birth of the United Nations that has a growing impact on all the aspects of political life. Second, science and technology create the condition of mobility, instant information and communication, new means of production, and so on. Thirdly, we have the possibility of an increased creativity and imagination via the new audio-visual means of communications. We can create a virtual reality and develop a collective imagination via computer, cellphone, TV, travel. Fourthly, the possibilities for education have enormously increased in a global village in which there is a mobility for students, exchange programs, English as communication tool, search for a more holistic approach. Finally, in the area of religion, we live in a situation where people from different religions meet one another. Our idea of mission became less institutional and we aim at a dialogue and collaboration in which people from different churches and religions seek to enrich our shared humanity.

We will consider the challenges of globalization in a second part of this reflection. Let us now already state that globalization is not something negative, although it can become a problem. Globalization can be a good thing. The

world in full of variety: of natural resources, of ethnic groups, of languages and cultures, of creative products, of philosophies and religions, of political and economic systems. Exchange among them can lead to mutual enrichment. We get, however, a problem when globalization results in the domination of one or several nations over the other, leading to their subjugation and even destruction. Such attempts at control do not go uncontested. Our world today is not exactly a happy global village but a world of contestation, division and violent conflicts.

1.3. From Modernity to Postmodernity⁷

Globalization is situated within a great historical transition of our worldview: from modernity to postmodernity. The word “modernity” describes the Enlightenment project of the 18th to 20th centuries which developed in the Western world and was imposed on the rest of the world by the colonial powers. The project aimed at getting all the world’s diverse peoples to see the same way: the rational way. The Enlightenment thinkers believed that there was only one possible answer to any question: the answer of human rationality. Human reason could bring about a continuous linear progress, was in control of absolute truths, and could plan an ideal social order. The great ideologies (“meta-stories”) of modern times, liberal capitalism, socialism, Marxism, Maoism, competed with one another to create nations in which people would enjoy equality, wellbeing, consumer goods, justice and peace.

The dream of creating a paradise, based on the enlightened human mind, was scattered by a number of historical events: the second world war, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the gulag, the Korean and Vietnamese wars, genocide, the war in Iraq. People do no longer believe in the great “meta-narratives” which did not deliver. We are exposed to the babble of diverse and contradictory fragments of stories. We have to learn to live with these fragments of meaning. We are pilgrims towards the truth, searching in different directions: New Age literature, Eastern religions, psychology, self-help books, ecology, feminism, primal religions, shamanism, astrology and many more. Truth is no longer understood as “something-out there”, found by reason, but it is rather made than found through a creative interaction between the human mind and the reality-out-there, the cosmos. We are involved in a continuous reality-construction-process in which our social construction of reality in terms of economic, political, cultural, and religious systems have to be constantly overhauled.

Roger Haight⁸ believes that the postmodern consciousness, in search for truth, has four distinctive characteristics. First, it is radically historical. All truths, also the religious truths contained in Bible and Tradition, are formulated in a

historical context and hence have to be interpreted in this context. Second, it is a critical social consciousness. All thought is situated in a social location. The God of order and might of the kings of this earth is a different one from the God of the Exodus who listens to the cry of the poor. We have a history written at the court of the powerful and the mostly forgotten history of the poor who live at the underside. Third, consciousness is pluralistic. We live in a world that has many cultures, religions and ideologies. They all seem to carry some important insights about our search for humanity. Fourth, it is cosmic. We do not approach any longer our problems in terms of a nation, not even in terms of planet earth. We became space travelers in an ever-expanding universe.

Modernism, meta-narratives, postmodernism, critical consciousness: am I talking about Asia? Am I not rather moving in the world of the enlightened philosophers of the West? To a certain extent, I am, and yet with the working paper I am discussing, I believe that “the postmodern mentality is a globalized phenomenon that affects above all the younger generations,” also in Asia. In the Philippines, the majority of the people have to survive in abject poverty. Only the wonderland of movies gives some respite to their consciousness of suffering and oppression. Joseph Estrada and Fernando Poe Jr. are their heroes. But there is another Philippines of people who moved to the city and other continents and joined a world in which productivity and consumerism (I buy, therefore I am) are the idols. It is in this pluralistic society with its many contradictions and insecurities that young people have to find their way. We now turn to their response.

1.4. Fundamentalism versus the Pluralism of Experiential Religion

We live in a pluralistic society, invaded by global neo-liberal capitalism. How do we situate religion within this changing world. Harvey Cox, in his *Fire from Heaven*⁹ gives us a general picture of how religion redefines itself within our global village. He describes the shift that takes place in the struggle to be the ultimate source of meaning. The struggle of previous centuries was between the Enlightenment versus traditional religion. The Christian churches indeed fought the Enlightenment on its own rationalistic ground. They presented their great meta-story, based on revelation and absolute truths, to counteract the godless ideologies of rationalism.

The belief that humans can produce a neatly organized world by following the precepts of reason was destroyed by the student revolt of 1968, followed by the drug- and pop culture of the 70's and 80's. The two competitors, the Enlightenment and the defenders of the supernatural, had to leave the fighting arena and were

soon replaced by two new ones: fundamentalism versus experiential religion. This new struggle is well described in the book, *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, launched some months ago in De La Salle University by the newly founded association of Catholic theologians in the Philippines.”

The invasion of Fundamentalism is often identified with the Islam. This is unfair. It is true that some sectors of the Islam call for a Holy War in the name of a fundamentalist reading of the Koran. But fundamentalism also invaded Christianity and the other world religions. Fundamentalist Christian churches have recently proliferated. Some American preachers of different Protestant and Sectarian denominations make God into the defender of an idolatrous capitalist system. Some rightist Catholics have joined them. I hope none of you is an admirer of Mother Angelica and her messages on American TV. This angelic mother and her surroundings proclaim a fundamentalist devotional Catholicism which, in my opinion, has very little to do with the message of our master, Jesus, the carpenter, mystic and activist of Nazareth.

How to situate the Catholic Church in Asia within this struggle between fundamentalism and experiential religion? To a certain extent, the two competitors of previous centuries are still around. A doctrinal Catholicism, going hand and hand with scientific modernity, remains fashionable among the elite. The Catholic Church adapted itself to the presence of these modern bourgeois Christians and caters to them in our elitist parishes and schools. A non-Christian elite joined in sending their children to the secure haven of reason and faith, offered by our Catholic schools. The two new competitors, however, are also on the scene. Fundamentalist Protestant groups invaded Asia. Some rightist Catholic movements and religious congregations joined them and preach a fundamentalist brand of Catholicism. On the other hand, experiential religion also developed in a variety of forms. Latin American Liberation theology and its Basic Ecclesial Communities reached Asia at the end of the 70's and got re-expressed in the Asian situation. The Charismatic movement has also been successful. It has to be placed in the experiential camp, although some ambiguity is present because it is part of a strongly institutionalized and centralized church. The Holy Spirit has often to obey the instructions of the Catholic hierarchy. Recently, a new form of experiential religion made its appearance: the New Age Movement. Again, the hierarchy warned us about the dangers of this New Age religion.

Why do people join in these new experiential manifestations of Christianity? I believe that many Christians are searching for meaning in a fast changing and pluralistic world and have a hard time to find this meaning in the established churches. We cannot deny that our churches suffer from sclerosis and continue

to live within a religious conflict of a past age: traditionalism versus modernity, a fortress church to be defended against the godless secular world. Young people find this conflict totally irrelevant and search for an alternative. They want to experiment, to discover and to find “spirit” in a post-modern age. They seek to introduce again a sacred dimension in life. How do we situate religious life within this situation of change?

1.5. Religious Life within a Post-modern Age

The working paper describes in a broad outline the reality that challenges us. I had expected that this description would be extended to religious life. Before proposing some challenges to the religious, we better do some “seeing” and ask the question about the shape religious institutes are in. I already mentioned that the Church is in turmoil, notwithstanding the efforts at renewal during Vatican II Council. What happened? The Church tried to make peace with modernity and the secular world, just at the time our world was moving away from modernity and entered in the postmodern, pluralistic global village. It would be interesting to have an analysis of how religious life is situated within this difficult transition. We keep saying that religious life is in decline in the West. Religious houses in the West are indeed old people’s homes. What are the reasons? The young churches have many vocations for religious life. But again, what are the reasons? Are they new responses to a changing situation or are they motivated by a search of survival of institutes that are and remain basically Western?

Seeing is sometimes painful. I wish I could help you in summarizing some efforts at seeing, done in documents on religious life. You can hardly prescribe medicine for a patient without having a good diagnosis. Our Church and religious life may suffer from a few diseases yet the diagnosis is kept within the inner chambers of our Church’s and religious’ leadership. Clerics and religious do not like that laity take a look inside their holy abode. The result of such an attitude has been a disaster for the American and some European churches when the sex scandals were made public. An American lay theologian concluded that clericalism which covered up for the sins of its members is the original sin of the Church.¹⁰ Religious may commit the same sin. The outside world is made to believe that everything is going well, while the structures in which religious are functioning are partly meaningless and collapsing.

How is religious life doing in Asia today? At the time of the Plenary Council of the Philippines (1991), the draft on the *Religious* asked for a more scientific and systematic review on the historical role and the present situation of the religious in the Philippines. This study has still to be made. The FABC does

not have an “Office of the Religious.” The Plenary Councils only make a few references to religious life. Four of the more than one hundred FABC papers (1976-2001) discuss religious life in Asia. In the maiden issue of *Religious Life Asia*, Father Pedregosa discusses “Consecrated Life in Asia Today: Realities and Challenges.” Let me briefly summarize his observations which will hopefully be elaborated in the near future.’¹¹

Religious life manifests itself as a reality of contrasts. It is marked by signs of renewal on the one hand, and evidence of decadence and dead weights on the other. We have the following contrasts: appreciation for the service of religious as social workers, educators and administrators but not necessary as spiritual or prayerful persons - an updated formation yet a general lack of inculturation and undue influence of the values of secularism, materialism, consumerism, and hedonism - greater awareness of the poor yet lack of justice and peace stance among religious communities - more attention to the feminist issues, yet the patriarchal attitudes and practices are still very much present. I highlighted some contrasts. The list is longer. Fr. Pedregosa sees it in a positive light. “They are to be seen more as a situation of contrast, not towards death or decadence of consecrated life, but rather towards renewal, rebirth, and re-interpretation of consecrated life in the Asian context and realities.”¹²

Among all these contrasts, the general lack of inculturation of consecrated life is for me personally the most disturbing. In the 80s’ and 90s’, a few hundreds of religious institutes, mainly of women, settled down in the Philippines. Some of them can be found among the poor and marginalized, but others set up a little school or kindergarten for the elite, and started recruiting for export. “Inflexible and suffocating structures, overbearing leadership, lack of integration of prayers and action,”¹³ and many other pre-Vatican II situations were the import which had to pay for this export of young religious to the greying pastures of Europe. All this was certainly done with the best of intentions, but some “seeing” of the Asian situation would most probably have prevented the continuation of colonial and neo-colonial ventures. Let me now return to the reality of Asia and briefly consider how the working paper proposes some challenges to religious life in Asia.

2. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN ASIA¹⁴

We continue our seeing of the reality of the world and Asia, but now with the eyeglasses of the religious who, with the “Passion for Christ and the Passion for Humanity” seek to bring good news, Jesus’ message of the coming of the

kingdom. My task is to discuss the opportunities, hence I am not supposed to bother with obstacles. I will have to practice some positive thinking. The working paper discusses eight opportunities. I treat them in two groups: issues that flow from the process of globalization and issues that are particularly stressed in FABC documents as special challenges for Asia.

2.1. Globalization

First, the working paper suggest that, as religious, we have to develop a global consciousness in order to embrace our pluralistic world with an open, yet critical attitude. Most of the religious institutes originated in the West and were exported to the East and South with a particular flavor: Belgian, Spanish, Italian, American ... and a particular devotion: a sacred, immaculate, crucified, broken, or other hearts. A global consciousness tries to overcome our many parochial attitudes and seek unity within diversity. Diversity is manifested in our openness for inculturation and contextualization which means that we are honoring our differences within the Church and our religious institutes. At the same time, we keep our identity as an institute. Unity in diversity will also direct us towards collaboration with other religious institutes, new movements and lay communities. Ecumenism between religious is overdue and has still a very long way to go.

Second, most of the religious institutes have still to discover that there is something which can be called a “postmodern mentality and attitudes.” In our leadership style, we continue to adopt the orderly and logical methods of the rational, parliamentary system of the West. We need clear and definitive rules. This may become disastrous when we have to handle secular and ecclesial environments that are in full change. Embracing postmodernity means that we cope positively with change, “receptive to pluralism and complexity, and as such, more vulnerable.” A leadership has to be conceived in terms of participative decision making in which information and view-points are needed from a wide variety of sources. Young people, steeped in a postmodern mentality, are “more tolerant of diversity and more centered on the subjective and the intuitive, less interested in accepting long-term and definitive life commitments.” They opt to work with fragments of meaning that have to be explored. We should be open to accept this postmodern generation in religious life. It may include considering “the possibilities of proposing forms of consecrated life ‘at tempus’.”

Third, in our globalized world, people are on the move. Filipino workers and migrants can be found all over the world, and this is also true for other Asian countries. Our religious communities, being themselves often transnational

communities, have an enormous opportunity to meet people in their mobility and to offer them hospitality. Welcoming others in our communities is a challenge that “presupposes that consecrated life undergoes a profound restructuring of life style, mentality, and programs.” At the same time, religious can conscientize Christian communities and make them aware of the presence of other nationalities, cultures and religions in their environment. Reaching out to these others and welcome them can counteract the destructive forces of “xenophobic, ethnocentric and racist attitudes.”

Fourth, the working paper mentions life and ecological issues. Religious can manifest their appreciation, defense, and passion for life in many ways. I feel that the first way to approach the issues of medical science and health is some serious critical study. The possibilities of intervening in life issues developed enormously in recent years but met strong resistance. Our church, while rightly warning about a “culture of death,” may have failed to fully integrate the fact that medical science became a part of human nature in today’s world. Moreover, Catholic party-line rules seem to join fundamentalist Christian groups that impose their own restrictive pro-life agenda on others without looking the whole picture. The issues of life are linked with the systemic issues of poverty and population explosion, justice and peace, ecology. These issues haunt us in most of the Asian countries in which the poor are not only the victims of exploitation, at the same time they become the victims of ecological disasters. Recent events in the Philippines and Asia remind us that, as Church, we failed to sufficiently address the ecological issues that are at the same time issues of greed, power, and corruption.

2.2. The Agenda of the FABC¹⁵

The working paper mentions the challenge of dialogue. We have “an opportunity when we are capable of entering into communion with those who are different from us.” The need of a triple dialogue with poverty, cultures, and religions has been present at the very start of the FABC assemblies (Taipei, 1974) and has been a recurring theme. 18 Mission, in an Asian perspective, has only one mode: a dialogue with the multi-faceted realities of Asia. Such a dialogue is not only needed because of the variety of cultures and religions. The real basis for dialogue is the faith conviction that the Spirit of God is at the work in the cultures and religions of Asia. Dialogue is journeying with the Spirit. God’s grace is present in the whole of creation and religions are a variety of responses to this gracious reality. This affirmation of the universality of God’s grace does not mean that we cannot and should not share with others our faith in Jesus of Nazareth and his dream of the kingdom. Such a sharing, however,

should leave behind all ideas of “exclusivism.” Poverty, cultures and religions are “*loci theologici*”, places where God’s action happens, and hence places for faith reflection and sharing between Christians and people of other religious traditions. This inclusive vision has not been well received by the Roman authorities, among others in the document *Dominus Jesus* (2000). At this time, we do not have to enter into this debate.

A first issue of dialogue in the Asian situation is the reality of the poor. “Social apostolate” is not something added to the mission of the Church, but an essential part of it. This affirmation of the Synod on Justice of 1971 became part and parcel of the FABC vision. The Church and the religious institutes should be “in solidarity with the poor, the excluded, and those threatened in their right to live.” We are challenged in the different ways. Religious need to have a direct exposure to the social realities by living in community and communion with the poor. Exposure has to be backed up with a serious study of the socio-economic and political causes of poverty. At the same time, social involvement has a spiritual, contemplative dimension. It is not simply an issue of liberating economic-political action. God’s spirit is present in the world of the poor, in their religiosity, solidarity, struggles and hopes. Discovering this presence will allow religious to journey with them. Finally, our social vision, action and contemplation have to be Asian. The defense of the rights of the poor and human rights must be seen against the background of the communitarian way of life of Asians. Social action should also to depend on Asian resources.

A second issue of dialogue is the presence of so many rich cultures in the Asian context. In the past, the Christian churches and religious institutes have grossly neglected the socio-cultural integration. Christians remained strangers in the Asian continent. A process of inculturation was finally launched after Vatican II Council, affirming God’s presence in the Asian human and cultural mosaic. Most Asian theologians question these efforts at inculturation that rather look as an embellishment, failing to touch the heart of Asian cultures. Culture is not something that we have. It belongs to our very being. In a holistic anthropology, culture is seen as belonging to the network of relationships that mold us into human persons. “If we do not pay attention to the human substratum that sustains consecrated life, we could easily be building on sand.” In approaching culture, we have to become aware that it belongs to this human substratum, and at the same time, that is inseparably linked up with religion. This brings us to the challenge of inter-religious dialogue.

The third issue of dialogue is the plurality of great religious traditions in Asia. The working paper warns about “the presence of secularistic materialism

in our globalized world. It favors a tendency towards idolatry that is expressed in a cult of the media, of the powerful, of institutions, customs, ritualism, and laws.” Religious may meet at this point the most basic challenge: the search for a new spirituality. Religious in Asia are privileged because they have a unique opportunity for developing a new spirituality by entering in a dialogue with Asian religiosity and religions. This dialogue requires an adequate formation and some serious study. Study and talking, however, are not enough. They should be linked up with cooperation and a common action to bring about fuller life in Asia. And they also will hopefully lead to a shared contemplation of the sacred, present in the Asian reality. Real dialogue is holistic, it is a dialogue of life in which “elements of interiority and historic commitment” arrive at a dynamic balance.

CONCLUSION: ASIA’S QUEST FOR HARMONY¹⁶

We come at the end of this reflection on the reality that challenges us. I had the rather frustrating task of describing a reality (to see) without discussing the issue of Christian discernment and action. I made a diagnosis without prescribing the medicine. I probably did not fully succeed and said too much. We live in a world moving towards globalization, yet profoundly divided. The opposing forces are fundamentalism versus openness for pluralism. When this opposition enters into the religious sphere, things get absolutized and the fundamentalist will have to slay the scapegoat, pluralism and experiential religion. A fundamentalist will be thoroughly confused about the working paper “Passion for Christ...” which presents the medicine for religious life by using a new language: storytelling faith. A fundamentalist does not need stories but a definite framework of truths and laws.

We are in Asia, and a storytelling faith does not create a problem. According to the FABC documents, Asians do not search for absolute truths but for harmony in the midst of a plurality of experiences, beliefs, and values. This “pluralism” is not easily accepted by Western and Roman minds that see in it the threat of “relativism.” And yet, the Asian bishops tells us that Christians will have to dare to relativize things in order to enter in dialogue with the mosaic of Asian experiences which somehow form a contrasting, harmonious whole. Asians have a unified view of the cosmos in which they see everything as interrelated within the complex web of life. This unified cosmological view is only perceived within the plurality of contrasting (Yin/Yang) experiences. We have to think by way of integration and inclusion, letting the plurality of experiences exist.

I tried to describe some of these contrasting experiences. It will hopefully be an invitation to meet two Samaritans who will put us on the road towards

harmony in the midst of the disappointing, yet fascinating realities of pluralism, strife, conflict, division and search for harmony in our global village.

Endnotes

1. *The Tablet* (July 10, 2004), 24.
2. *Religious and Human Promotion*, Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, Vatican City 1981.
3. *Methodology: Asian Christian Theology. Doing Theology in Asia* (FABC Papers, no. 96); Orlando Quevedo, "Asian Realities and Cultures: Their Implications to Education," *Toward a Formation-Oriented Education*. Manila: FABC, 1993.
4. Jose Maria Escriba, *The Way*, No.941 (Manila: Sinag-Tala, 1982).
5. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1980).
6. The text of the FABC Assemblies were published by Claretian Publications: *For All Peoples of Asia* (3 Volumes). They can also be found in the FABC papers.
7. I briefly describe modernity-postmodernity in *A New Church for a New Age* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 25-30.
8. Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 301-334.
9. Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven*. (London: Cassell, 1996), 299-321.
10. David Gibson, *The Coming Catholic Church*. (Harper San Francisco, 2003), 197-219.
11. Quirico Pedregosa, "Consecrated Life in Asia Today," *Religious Life Asia*, 1(1998), 22- 32. See FABC papers no.72, 1995.
12. *Ibid.*, 28.
13. *Ibid.*, 27.
14. 16 The quotations are taken from the working paper. "With Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity," *Religious Life Asia* 6, 2(April-June 2004), 1-43.
15. Felix Wilfred et al., "What the Spirit Says to the Churches. A Vademecum..." *Vidyajyoti* 62, 2 (1998), 124-133. 133). This paper summarizes the pastoral and theological orientation of the FABC.
16. Synod of Asia, "Message to the People of God," *Origins* 28,2 (May 28, 1998). The FABC has several reflections on Harmony. See FABC papers 75 & 76.

STRESS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE: A CALL TO MAKE MEANINGFUL CHOICES

Shanti Jose, FCC

“Life is 10 percent what you make it, and 90 percent how you take it.”

– Irving Berlin

Meeting the challenges and dangers of life in the world of today has become very stressful to people of every walk of life, especially to religious women and men because of the greater expectation placed upon them by the Church and the society. The fact is that we all react differently to the stressors and conflicts around us. While some of us seek greater closeness with others during stress, some want emotional space when stress is high; some become less competent under stress, while some others take charge of the situation. There are still some who believe that everyone else is responsible for their own problem. Some others become frustrated, while some may fall into maladaptive behaviour patterns and it can even upset the physiological and emotional rhythm of the individual. Whatever the way we cope with stress, it is part of the fabric of life. It affects everyone. It will impact our lives and the lives of others because we are social beings. Some stress is necessary for the well-being of any person. Any physical or mental effort, any problem-solving or decision-making requires stress to some degree. Such stress often helps people to find the expected resources within themselves. When we face stressful situations squarely, we not only discover hidden potentials for new ways of perceiving, feeling and acting, but also learn to understand the context of ourselves and others better and become able to stop reacting and start responding to people, events and situations proactively.

This article is an attempt to highlight the impact of stress in the life journey of religious (especially women) and its influence on the evolution of their self. Through a process of enlightenment and awareness about the realities of life, they can make meaningful choices and take necessary steps in the realization of

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their life-goal, i.e., to experience the Kingdom of God within oneself and spread it through their life witness. This in turn will help the development of their personality, through self-awareness and physical, emotional, social and spiritual integration, aiding them to be rooted and winged and to set their souls on fire.

1. STRESS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY

There are about 1,30,000 religious in India and majority of them are women.¹ They are engaged in different apostolates: education in different levels, health care, community development programs, and work among the poor in the remote areas of the country, aiming at their liberation from different types of oppression. The contributions of women religious in these areas are remarkable.

Notwithstanding the very many good things they do, their presence does not often make the desired impact on the lives of the people.² They themselves feel that their living of religious life is not relevant to the times. Within their own structures, they are also faced with problems such as the growing number of dropouts, a declining quality of commitment and of spiritual life, and an increasing number of frustrated and indifferent members.³ Against these realities it is important to review the experience of women religious today in India, in relation to their community life, the conflicts they encounter, the ongoing communal violence and threats from the society, the pressures and demands of their apostolate and other stressful situations that they face outside of their religious life.

The role of women religious today in the Indian society is both “to be” and “to do.” If their “doing” outweighs their “being” then most likely it will affect their physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual realms and they will be unable to fulfil their role expectation, i.e. to make the presence of Christ visible. Nor can they make an impact on the people especially in the multi-religious society of India where the reality of the Absolute is conveyed through the “being” of holy people and not so much through their “doing.”

1.1. What is Stress?

Stress is an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that people experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being. The word stress means different things to different people. Some people define stress as events or situations that cause them to feel tension, pressure, or negative emotions such as anxiety and anger. Others view stress as the response to these situations. This response includes physiological changes—such as increased heartbeats and muscle tension—as well as emotional and behavioural changes.

Stress can have both positive and negative effects. Stress is a normal, adaptive reaction to threat. It signals danger and prepares us to take defensive action. Fear of things that pose realistic threats motivates us to deal with them or avoid them. In personal relationships, stress often leads to less cooperation and more aggression. If not managed appropriately, stress can lead to serious problems. Exposure to chronic stress can contribute to both physical illnesses, such as heart disease, and mental illnesses, such as anxiety disorders. On the other hand, stress also motivates us to achieve and fuels creativity. Although stress may hinder performance in difficult tasks, moderate stress seems to improve motivation and performance in less complex tasks.

One among the best definitions of stress is Davidson's: "Stress is the psychological and physiological reaction that takes place when you perceive an imbalance in the level of demand placed on you and your capacity to meet that demand."⁴ In simpler words, stress evolves when we must do something that we are not able and/or willing to do.⁵

1.2. Potential Sources of Stress

Stress is a common experience. We may feel stress when we are very busy, have important deadlines to meet, or have too little time to finish all of our tasks. Often people experience stress because of problems at work or in social relationships, such as a poor evaluation by a supervisor or an argument with a friend. Some people may be particularly vulnerable to stress in situations involving the threat of failure or personal humiliation. Others have extreme fears of objects or things associated with physical threats-such as snakes, illness, storms, or flying in an airplane-and become stressed when they encounter or think about these perceived threats. Major life events, such as the death of a loved one, can cause severe stress. Hence for women religious, stress could be a result of family pressure, responsibility, work deadlines, pressure from superiors, staff conflicts and group conflict, impending decisions, frequent travel, irregular meals, interrupted sleep etc..." I have classified these sources of stress into two: the society and the community life.

1.2.1. Socio-cultural Influence

The socio-political scenario of India is changing day by day. Christians, who form a religious minority in India, are in many areas under the scanner of fundamentalist groups that pose an ongoing threat to Christians, especially to religious who take the leadership roles in many places. Does this socio-political scenario of constant communal threats have an effect on the religious who work in such areas? Families are becoming smaller and smaller as the years pass by.

Many who join the religious life do come from such nuclear families. Does this nuclear family structure play a role in developing stress among those who join religious life from such families? The spirit of competition thrives even in the portals of religious services and ministries. Does the so called ‘career –challenge’ trigger the development of stress among the religious?

The degradation of value system and the declining morality in the world is a concern that challenges the role of the religious in the society and it raises a question in terms of the relevance of religious life in the modern world. From a socio-cultural perspective, what are the challenges that the religious face in practising the Gospel values? We live in a world of tensions, war and the threats of terrorism. The changing world is experiencing poverty of values – high incidence of abuse, crime and violence are examples. We are continually confronted with a conflict-ridden society. We become cynical and distrustful of local, State and Union Governments. Our institutions are often under careful watch of the people and authorities, trying to find fault with and sue us. Often we are under pressure to bribe the system to get the legal permissions on time. The low ‘frustration-tolerance’ of the millennium generation demands more accountability from us in terms of our dealings and the discipline we impose. Explosion of technology and economy do influence the religious, since they need to update themselves and their institutions, along with the growing society. Changing family culture - especially value deterioration in families - push the religious to inculcate value education to the young generation in an appealing manner: this is a difficult task. Working with ‘at-risk’ populations is another area of stress. What is right and wrong seems to change daily or vary with persons and circumstances; hence, making rational judgements on ethical and moral issues is often troublesome. These are some of the reasons for stress among women religious, arising from the society they live in.

1.2.2. Community Structure

The community life is another important area causing paramount stress in the life of women religious. Does the community dynamics, which involves a ‘superior’ and ‘subjects’ from diverse cultures and family backgrounds, play havoc in religious circles in the form of power struggle and domination, discrimination and intolerance on the basis colour, caste and status even in this 21st century? Are favouritism, blackmailing and character assassination prevalent among religious? How and to what extent the vowed life of a religious plays its role in developing stress? Interpersonal relationship in the community is an area which is stressful and traumatic to some, as the words of St. Augustine reminds us: “community life is a white martyrdom.” Special attention needs to

be given to the area of 'middle age' crisis of the women religious, when due to life transitions, they need to look for alternative ways of being effective and innovative, especially if they get less support and are misunderstood. Modern youth, who enter religious life, often search for personality growth and fulfilment and are concerned about social involvement and justice, genuineness and truth, relevance and meaning in the modern society; casting them into traditional moulds and demanding conformity to traditional ways⁶ is a matter of great stress for the young generation. Our tendency towards selfishness, control, ambition and competition, and our desire to be the first and the greatest -all these increase stress to oneself and others.

2. SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS

Subjective experiences of stress are the various difficulties that one faces during the course of life, from the diverse aspects of one's functioning, while striving to fulfil the demands of life. For women religious who live in a community setting and render their services in different apostolates, there are a number of occasions when they feel stressed and undergo the consequences in their personal and community life. By their very call to religious life, they are expected to put in their maximum without fail and do things in a perfect manner. This role expectation from the society, from the authorities, from the family members and from themselves is the main cause of their stress, resulting in the imbalance of their emotional well-being. The incapacity to meet the demands in these areas leaves them with emotional difficulties, which beyond the thresholds, manifests itself in physical ailments and aches. The struggle to balance the stress and its consequences results in behavioural expressions of frustration and intolerance.

I have gathered the following findings through a study on subjective experience of stress among women religious in North India:⁷ Subjective experiences of the respondents could be divided into the following two categories: areas of stress and effects of stress.

2.1. Areas of Stress

One of the themes that emerged during the study of the subjective experience of stress in the lives of women religious was the different vistas of their life. These areas include intra personal, inter personal, professional and organizational realms.

2.1.1. Intrapersonal

Stress tends to lead to diminished creativity and stagnation of personal development. As such, it negatively affects work motivation, pleasure and well-being. Moreover, it diminishes the quality of social relations, resulting in

conflicts and isolation. As a result, overall individual effectiveness can be greatly diminished. Ultimately, stress can lead to different kinds of psychological and physical complaints and illnesses, which may contribute to a premature death.⁸

Personality makes a significant contribution to performance and well-being. There is significant relationship between extraversion and subjective well-being,⁹ while introversion and neuroticism have been consistently associated with increased stress,¹⁰ emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.¹¹ Personal weakness is the main cause of stress here. Many respondents in the study thought that they were incapable of fulfilling the expectations of the superiors and those in authority and of the relatives and family members. Other reported reasons for stress in their personal lives were: their convictions or attitudes, expectations from others, ego-centrism, perfectionism, selfishness, intolerance, lack of openness and self-acceptance, difficulty to face challenges and the difficulty to find meaning in the painful experiences and rigid practices.

2.1.2. Interpersonal

Another area where people experience high degree of stress is interpersonal relationships in community life. The members are not able to discern the movement of the spirit in a community with people from different cultures and age groups, with different educational backgrounds, motivations etc. For some, generation gaps, the necessity to seek permissions to carry out the responsibilities and a lack of faith vision are potential causes of stress. The multicultural element in the community is certainly a cause for conflict. Especially in indigenous Congregations, personal freedom and spontaneity are so controlled as to cause considerable stress among the members. When members are from different cultures, food is a cause of stress because their tastes are different.

Some other causes of stress in the interpersonal realm are: fear of what others will think, fear of criticism, fear of propaganda, lack of support, acceptance and cooperation from other members and lack of unity among community members, which results in breach of confidentiality. The personal weaknesses of other community members are also sometimes a great cause of stress.

2.1.3. Professional

Career is another area where most of the religious women experience different kinds of stress: factors intrinsic to the job (heat, workload, shift work, lack of qualified hands); relationships at work (conflict with co-workers or supervisors, lack of social support); role in the organization (for example, role ambiguity); career development (lack of status, lack of prospects for promotion, lack of a career path, job insecurity); organizational structure and climate (lack

of autonomy, lack of opportunity to participate in decision making, lack of control over the pace of work); community and work interface (conflict between domestic and work roles) etc. These are some matters that add stress to the women religious who need to thrive in the changing scenario of religious life, by becoming ‘mystics in the market places’.

The competitive nature of education and the growing demands from external authorities like priests force the women religious to work harder. When the institution belongs to their own society or Congregation, and in responsible areas of work as in the case of formation houses, their sense of duty demands the religious to work without rest and proper time limits. This makes them feel over-burdened and burned-out.

For some, travelling associated with the ministry requires them to sacrifice food and sleep. Sometimes they need to travel to remote and interior village areas and other community members’ lack of understanding of these struggles is also a form of occupational stress, experienced by women religious.

2.1.4. Organizational

The causes for organizational stress could be lack of a ‘friendship model’ or ‘team-work model’ of governance in the Congregation. For some, the responsibility itself, and the decision making involved in it, is a matter of stress since they have to get permission from more than one person: sometimes the activity completely loses its relevance due to the delay in decision making and its implementation. So the lack of enough freedom to make decisions was considered by the respondents as another stressful situation for women religious. Some others opined that the rules and regulations, traditions and ideas of the organization and the rigid structure that comes from a rigid culture are causes of enormous stress for them. They felt that a little more flexibility and freedom could ease their stress.

2.2. Effect of Stress

Stress affects people in different ways based on their personality and their reaction or response to stress. Stress evokes emotional, physical, behavioural and cognitive, psychosomatic and spiritual responses. Some people *freeze* or become blank when they come across the hard realities of life; some others *flee* or avoid it. It can lead to psychosomatic complaints as well as burnout. There are also people who *float* in the midst of such realities of life and take a ‘no-care attitude’ or become lukewarm, doing neither good nor bad. Yet others *fight* or face the stress squarely and make meaning out of all that they encounter, leading to wellness and wholeness. Based on the strategy the religious adapt to handle

their stressful situations, they become:

- either victims of the situations having no goals for themselves
- or villains who control all others with their selfish motives
- or else winners with clear goal for self and others. They become integrated persons through awareness or preparedness, development of their personality and a faith vision.

The following are two common effects of stress; they are temporary, if one overcomes the stress; they last longer when people are unable to cope up with the stressful situation:

2.2.1. Psychosomatic Complaints

Most of us have been plagued one time or another by headaches, tense muscles, racing heart and other similar bodily sensations. These so-called psychosomatic complaints have a warning function that can be compared to pain and fear. They are signals that the body is dealing, or trying to deal, with environmental demands.¹² Physical reactions are often the first signs that we are suffering from distress. The complaints may vary between gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. nausea, stomach cramps), respiratory symptoms (e.g. pressure on chest, unable to breathe deeply enough), cardiac symptoms (e.g. rapid heart rate, pounding of heart), dizziness and fainting, headaches and tingling sensations in the limbs. Such signals warn us that we are running the risk of becoming overworked and that it is time to change our behaviour.¹³ If we neglect psychosomatic complaints for a longer period, or bring only makeshift measures into action, these complaints may become chronic.

2.2.2. Burnout

Burnout can be considered as a long-term stress reaction that is caused by the prolonged exposure to job stress. The term “burnout” is a metaphor that refers to the draining of energy - that is, more energy is lost than replenished, comparable to a car battery which will drain if not enough energy is generated from the dynamo.¹⁴ Burnout is nowadays defined as a syndrome consisting of three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness (or reduced personal accomplishment).¹⁵ *Exhaustion* refers to mental and physical exhaustion, a feeling of being overextended. One feels drained, used up and unable to unwind and recover. *Cynicism* refers to a cold and distant attitude towards work and the people on the job. Cynicism results from defensive coping with the demands of the job,¹⁶ an inadequate attempt to protect oneself from stressful organizational circumstances and disappointments. *Ineffectiveness* is the third burnout

dimension, which refers to doubt in one's ability to make a difference, signifying an increasing perception of incompetence at work.¹⁷

2.3. Manifestations of Stress

How do we concretely come across the effects of stress in people's behavior? Stress is manifested in all the features of our personality because each individual is an inter-connected entity. Let us look at how stress is manifested in different realms of human life:

2.3.1. Emotional Responses

When stressful, people feel irritable, aggressive, withdrawn and unable to relate normally. It lowers their self-esteem, makes them moody, cynical, guilty, anxious or with feelings of panic. Some feel depressed, over sensitive to criticism, edgy, angry, hopeless, worried and miserable. Some others feel like dying and have irrational fears, resenting others, feeling ice-layered or depersonalized. They will be upset over little things that normally wouldn't upset at all. These are all symptoms and signs of stress.

The women religious experienced symptoms from the depressive spectrum as some of the behavioural manifestations which far surpassed those involving anger and irritability. Feeling low, tiredness, irritation, frustration, discouragement, misunderstandings, anger, anxiety, avoidance and feelings of isolation are the symptoms most often reported.

2.3.2. Physical Responses

Those who undergo stress may experience muscular pains, tensions, headaches, aching neck, shoulders and back, stomach pain, feeling sick, choking feeling in throat, twitching of the eye or lips, shakiness, clenched teeth or fists, raised heart beats, palpitation, sweating palms, poor blood circulation, dry mouth, frequent urinations, dizzy spells, irregular breathing, diarrhoea, or constipation and allergies, asthma, or skin problems becoming worse, itching, scratching, vague aches and pains, tense muscles etc.

The stress symptoms experienced by the women religious in the study are: physical problems including shoulder pain, tiredness, uncontrolled tears, falling sick, high blood pressure, cardiac problems and even cancer.

2.3.3. Behavioural Responses

People experiencing stress may be worse at managing time and at organizing themselves, rushing around without getting much done, sleeping or eating a lot more or less than usual, doing things in a hurry, losing touch with friends, blaming

others for the problem, taking it out on others, needing a drink, turning to drugs, over reacting, fidgeting, behaving obsessively, missing school or community a lot, lack of concentration, loss of memory, lack of motivation, compulsive behaviour, restlessness and irritability.

The behavioural responses which women religious in the study exhibited in reaction to stress are: reluctance to cooperate, avoiding the situations, not eating properly, not resting, not taking care of oneself, punishing or blaming oneself, resisting others etc.

2.3.4. Cognitive Responses

Individuals experiencing stress often find themselves suffering from poor concentration, having difficulty remembering things, being in a hurry all the time, acting indecisively, having no confidence, over reacting to others and things, feeling really tired, feeling confused, making too many mistakes, always putting off things, not being able to plan far ahead, always imagining the worst, worrying rather than trying to solve problems, becoming stubborn and controlling and having poor attributes.

The women religious reported symptoms which blocked their thinking from functioning effectively and responsibly, when they underwent stress. The symptoms were: preoccupation, inability to concentrate, negative or devaluing self-talk and arguing in mind.

2.3.5. Spiritual Symptoms of Stress

Spiritual symptoms of stress in the women religious include: inability to find meaning in life, having no direction or purpose, feeling shallow, feeling uncharitable or being cold or uncaring and the inability to trust others. A feeling of routine and monotony in prayer life, especially mental prayers, rosary and daily Eucharistic Celebration etc. can also be symptoms of stress.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF STRESS

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or nervousness. A religious is a person who has chosen to live a life based on the example and teachings of Christ. Stress can come either through a person or an event or through a situation. For a religious, stress can come from one's commitments, relationship or communion with others or from one's mission or apostolate. Whatever may be the source or cause of stress, it tests the limits of a person. It can break or make a person based on the choice we make.

Here contributions of stress means the benefits an individual receives as result of the stressful experiences in life or the learning experience an individual has in the process of dealing with stresses in different areas of his/her life. It is a positive psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states. In the case of a religious the stress energy often transforms the person to look at life with renewed vigour, enthusiasm, sense of purpose, meaning and hopefulness.

3.1. Stress a Call to be Aware of the Realities of Life

Unless and until stress and storms hit our lives we will be complacent in ourselves and live in a fool's paradise. The pressures of life are necessary to make us aware of the reality of the universe we live in. The knowledge of the truth about the world, the families, the human life and our own personal realities will set us free from false imaginations we have about people, events and circumstances. The imperfections in the world, the value deterioration and the personal weaknesses of individuals will open our eyes to look at life with audacity. The advancement of technology, economic development and progress in the field of communication alert us to discern between the good and evil things in the world and the strengths and weaknesses of our personal lives. This knowledge will help us not to be swallowed up by the world's flow, rather to swim against the current with wings on fire and not to leave any stone unturned to give Jesus to the troubled world. This is done by adapting a positive attitude towards life and by realizing that we live in an imperfect world and among people with their personal weaknesses as we have ours. The awareness of our potentials will lead us to develop our capacities and update our knowledge so as to lead a life free of worries, tensions and fears. We become aware that each one is a child of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Yes, the truth will set us free (Jn 8:32) to make meaningful choices.

3.2. Stress a Call to Make Positive Choices in Life

Stress is not an incurable illness. It is a choice.¹⁸ It offers us a choice to become a victim, a villain or a winner in life, having goals for self and for others. Based on the choice we make our life becomes miserable or meaningful. A religious who lives a life based on the gospel values- striving to love than to be loved, to serve than to be served, to understand than to be understood, to comfort and console than to be comforted and consoled – is able to translate all his/her needs into values. For a religious the choice is between life or death, prosperity or adversity (Dt. 30:15). They choose to do good, come what may! They become like stars shining in the darkness. They stop becoming slaves to the situations, events and people who cause stress to them; rather they become winners. It is a

call to make one's performance better and behaviour more attractive in order to be effective, meaningful and appealing in one's context. It raises the awareness of the person to stop reacting and start responding to the situations with a heightened consciousness i.e., to become pro-active, which means to focus on the context and not on the behaviour. It also prepares them to accept the reality that we live in an imperfect world and there are imperfections within oneself. It makes them cautious not to waste their time and energy by becoming upset over the situation, instead to make a positive choice to come out of the unhealthy emotional consequences of stress.

3.3. Stress a Call to Set One's Goal in Life

The religious, who has made a choice to be pro-active in the midst of stressful situations, focusing on the context than on the stress-inciting behaviour, stops being the prisoner of her/his past and become the architect of her/his future. He/she looks towards the future with renewed vision and hope. It enables the religious to come to terms with self and stop blaming the situation, events and persons; instead he/she starts understanding why people behave the way they do and why things happen in the way they happen. Such religious begin to realize that everything happens with a purpose and no one can stop things from happening because, "In everything God has a plan, a plan for our welfare, to give us a future and full of hope" (Jer 29:11). It helps them to stop accusing and start excusing, finding out reasons for all that happens after the model of their master who said "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk 23:34). This changes one's attitude towards stressful situations and the person is enlightened to look at the other options and alternatives. They are able to find meaning for their sufferings or tensions and turmoil in the light of faith and learn that it is in and through struggles of life that growth takes place. They look forward to experiencing the Kingdom of God- righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17)- right here and now by repenting (Mk 1:15), being born again (Jn 3:3), becoming like little children (Mt 18:1-3), and being spiritually poor (Mt 5:3). Thus the religious become integrated through effective interaction with the stressful environment around him/her. It leads to emotional maturity, which refers to our ability to inform our decisions with an understanding of our own and others' emotions in order to act productively. It means the ability to manage our own emotions and the ability to interact well with others.

3.4. Stress a Call to Find Meaning and Purpose and Self Enhancement (Faith Vision)

Stressful situations often bog us down to the core because we are not able to find a reason or purpose behind the struggle. The thought that 'there is a

hidden meaning for every suffering and it will be revealed slowly' and 'nothing happens by chance, everything happens with a purpose' is very much comforting in moments of pain and agony. Once we are able to attribute a meaning to our suffering, or to attach an intention while enduring discomfort or if we can channelize the energy of our negative feelings in physical activity consciously, life becomes meaningful and creative with all its experiences. This helps the religious experience a sense of conquest in life, and to look at life with ease and comfort. It not only enhances their self, but also enables them to reach out to others and lift them up to face life and its challenges courageously. Thus stress becomes a source of enchantment for the religious in their commitment, communion and mission.

Assagioli conceptualized healthy human adult development in two distinct stages: personal psycho-synthesis and spiritual psycho-synthesis. Personal psycho-synthesis involves exploring the structure of one's own psyche and becoming familiar with the contents of one's personal unconscious. Spiritual psycho-synthesis consists of the integration of the personality around a deeper centre, the spiritual self. The acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension recognizes that there is a connectedness that goes beyond the personal level and that this spiritual dimension is essential for (re)discovering meaning and purpose in life. The fundamental assumption underlying this perspective is that individuals have the innate wisdom and knowledge to find their own personal responses to the questions and distresses that life can confront them with.¹⁹

Spirituality can be viewed as the ultimate context of giving meaning to life. In Spirituality, the participants in the study experienced a greater sense of worth, hope and reason for living. Their feeling of inner strength was enhanced and their capacity for transcendence increased. They had a greater ability to step back from their lives and gain a new perspective. The participants are unanimously of the opinion that stress has helped them to deepen their faith in God; it has deepened their commitment and God became their supreme priority. Some of them even reported that their intentions and motivations became pure and clearer and it changed their vision of life.

4. COPING RESOURCES

Coping depends on how we look at things, not on how they are in themselves', since the latter does not account for individual differences in responses to changes in society, workplace and in the organization. We all know that individuals differ significantly in their vulnerability and resilience to the environment and to change.

Coping resources are the means by which the individuals face the stressful situations in order to come to terms with the demands of the stressor. Coping resources could lead an individual to cope effectively as well as to cope ineffectively. Effective coping helps them to feel balanced or in control of the situation while ineffective coping makes them feel inadequate and miserable. Coping resources could be personal or of the community:

4.1. Personal Coping Resources

For a religious, foremost among personal coping resources are spiritual resources like, prayer, meditation, reading the Word of God, reception of Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, spiritual direction, surrendering to the Will of God, seeing things in the light of faith, personal relationship with Jesus etc. To survive stressful hard times the religious need to depend on a higher power which controls them, and allows everything for the best of their well-being. Through meditation and conscious reception of sacraments we receive the love and mercy of God. Through the spiritual directions and guidance we are able to look at life in the light of faith. We understand that nothing happens by chance, because God has a plan for us, a plan for our welfare, to give us a future full of hope (Jer 29:11), and we are able to submit ourselves fully to the plan of God. Through reconciliation we become free of the hurts and are able to share this unconditional love and mercy with others. As the outcome of these we become transformed persons who are able to respond to the people, events, and situations of life with serenity and peace. We grow in our understanding and become more open to the feedbacks we constantly receive from others. They become opportunities to learn about ourselves and grow without judging or blaming others or ourselves. We are able to find the meaning behind the sufferings of life and experience growth within. Its effect is seen in the way we live and relate, in our words and actions. It leads to slowing down and taking time to listen to oneself and others, breathing fully, being truthful at all times, listening deeply, looking at the problems objectively without judging oneself or others and being patient.

Another cluster of coping resources found to be used by women religious come under the category of psychological resources, which include sharing with friends and superiors, self-acceptance and accepting others, not worrying too much, optimistic attitude, having one's own convictions of life and asking for guidance. These resources help them to remain in silence and reflect over the stressful situation with confidence, thus enhancing their ability to deal with it. They learn new skills and techniques to meet the demands of the stressor. Sharing with someone whom we trust, a friend or one who accepts us as we are,

helps us to open ourselves without any reservations, to pour out all that we feel without the fear of being judged. It gives great relief to the stored-up emotions and make one feel accepted, heard and understood. This will help us to improve our self-esteem and feel secure and supported. Professional guidance helps us to stop reacting to the behaviours and words of others and to 'care-front' them without breaking our relationships. We also learnt to respond to the situations effectively, which in turn will reduce our anxiety and lead us to function fruitfully in any given situation. The new skills and techniques make us more confident and we are able to smile at the problems and solve them in silence, which would otherwise be moments of great stress. Smile and silence are both the grace of God and our personal initiative.

Some people use physical means of relaxation like breathing exercises, yoga and rest; some reported that being systematic and planning things in advance help them to cope with stress. Some of them also made use of the knowledge available through seminars and courses, retreats etc. in order to help them cope with stressful situations. A healthy body is the sign of a healthy mind. Physical means of relaxation helps to tone up the muscles and make the body flexible. Breathing exercises activates the cellular respiration and increases the fresh energy in the body which in turn freshens up the mind to look at life with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Adequate rest energises the body and mind to work with clarity and sharpness. Planning helps to prioritize and put first things first and do things on time without wasting our time and energy; this will help us to avoid confusion, tackle the overload effectively and delegate works properly so as to meet the targets.

4.2. Community Copping Resources

These resources are equally available for all the members, provided they are willing to make use of them. There are time-tables in the communities, which are the opportunities to help the members not to get over-burdened. The time table includes time for community prayers, meditation, yoga, community recreation, community meals, weekly shared prayers, monthly dialogues, personal meetings with superiors, annual retreats, renewal programs, animation and follow up programs, community work etc. The presence of the other members in the community and the opportunities to get engaged are great moments of stress relief. Community and its activities are great stress buffers, if understood properly. The time for common meals, prayer and recreation helps one to regulate one's physical, spiritual, emotional and social needs of nutrition, enlightenment, acceptance, understanding etc. A lot of 'give and take' takes place during these moments and a sense of belonging, care and concern emerge from these common

programs. These are also opportunities to share one's burden and ask help and support from each other and understand one another. The shared prayers and dialogues are the ways to discover the truth and accept the truth in the proper sense. Through the annual retreats and renewal programs we are able to know the signs of the times and the need of the hour and renew and adapt ourselves to the changing trends of the world, the Church and the society, without being disturbed. Participation in the community works enable us to use our talents and develop our creativity for the welfare of the community and for God's greater glory, which in turn enhances ourselves and help us to make healthy choices every time. The personal meeting with the superiors are opportunities to reveal our inner self, express our difficulties and suggestions, asking clarifications and seeking help in our needs. All these contribute to the wellness and wholeness of the religious.

CONCLUSION

Today religious are called to involve more actively in the saving mission of the Church. They live in a fast changing world and Church, where greater responsibility is placed on them and greater trust shown in them. Greater involvement in the mission of the church means that the women religious have to face new challenges and greater risks for the sake of God's kingdom.²⁰ As a result, multi-tasking becomes one of the options to cope up with this situation, which in turn becomes challenging, interesting as well as stressful. Stress can have both positive and negative effects. Some thrive in all the areas of their commitment as a religious, leading a meaningful life of wellness and wholeness, while others succumb to chronic physical and mental illness and lead bitter lives for the rest of their lives.

Identifying the factors that hamper an effective religious life and understanding and analysing how those factors interfere with the productive life of a religious will enable them to alter their reactions and respond effectively so as to contribute more to oneself and to the society. Though the impact of stress is very difficult to cope with at that moment, in the long run, it becomes a blessing in disguise for most of the religious. Stress is also an instrument in shaping one's personality rooted and grounded in convictions and to prioritize the values, assigning importance to the right things in life. The religious, who cope well with the stressful situations at various stages in their lives, continue to enjoy a successful and satisfying religious committed life. Some of the factors that help religious to experience the positive impact of stressful events include: the personal resources of communication and conflict resolution skills, a consistent and committed spiritual life, the ability to adjust and adapt, the

community resources of recreation and opportunities to express difficulties and seek guidance during crisis time. The positive impact could be seen both in their personal and spiritual lives in the immediate and distant future.

The more willing the person is to open up and share one's feelings and difficulties with others in the community, the greater is the positive impact of the stress on a person's physical, emotional and spiritual health. Though the community resources remain the same for all the religious, it is only with adequate individual resources of self-esteem and mastery that the inevitable stresses in religious life could be dealt with. An individual needs to reflect on oneself and need a sense of competence to learn new skills and techniques to meet the demands of the time. So stress is a call to make meaningful choices, by recognizing one's values. It is an invitation to lead a meaningful and integrated life. It is a challenge for deeper commitment and genuine communion, leading to a fruitful mission.

Endnotes

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EVANGELII GAUDIUM ON EVANGELIZATION MARKED with Joy

Johnson Thurackal, CMF

Pope Francis has offered to the Church an inspiring document, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), that discusses a wide range of issues. It was written in response to the most recent meeting of the Synod of Bishops, which took place in October, 2012. The Synod deliberated on the theme of the *new evangelization* and so this is the focus of *Evangelii Gaudium*. In this Apostolic Exhortation, the Holy Father has envisioned the reform of the Church in a missionary key. Archbishop Rino Fisichella, who presented the document at a Vatican press conference, summarized its main message this way: “If we were to sum up Pope Francis’s *Evangelii Gaudium* in a few words, we could say that it is an Apostolic Exhortation written around the theme of Christian joy in order that the Church may rediscover the original source of evangelization in the contemporary world. The Pontiff offers this document to the Church as a roadmap and guide to her pastoral mission in the near future. It is an invitation to recover a prophetic and positive vision of reality without ignoring the current challenges. Pope Francis instills courage and urges us to look ahead despite the present crisis, making the cross and the resurrection of Christ once again our ‘the victory banner.’”¹

The text is long and the Pope substantiates it in his own words: “I have dealt extensively with certain topics with a detail which some may find excessive” (EG 18). “*Evangelii Gaudium* will have a deep impact on the Church for several generations. It provides challenging insights to all who have committed to the cause of the Gospel for genuine witnessing of their life and mission, and for a renewed approach to make the Gospel relevant to the Church and to the world. Therefore, *Evangelii Gaudium* is a treasure for the Church and consecrated life and a guide book for renewed missionary commitment.

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1. AN INVITATION TO JOY: THE CHALLENGE TO BE RELEVANT

Before it describes anything that we should say or do, this exhortation indicates that the sign of encounter with Christ and the first moment of its proclamation is *joy*. Holy Father opens the exhortation thus: “The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful *to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization* marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in the years to come” (EG 1).

The Gospel makes the same point when it describes the encounter of Jesus and the yet-to-be-born John the Baptist (Lk 1:39-45). John’s response is to leap for joy, and in that very action, he also “tells” the good news to his mother. It is surely not accidental that the exhortation concludes with a prayer including the following: “Filled with Christ’s presence, you brought joy to John the Baptist, making him exult in the womb of his mother” (EG 288). The most primary call of this document is an invitation to be filled with joy.

What is this “new chapter of evangelization marked by joy” that the Pope is speaking in this Apostolic Exhortation to which all are earnestly invited be partakers? Francis addresses this question in brilliant and unequivocal terms in the text of the exhortation. “I dream of a *missionary option*, that is, a *missionary impulse capable of transforming everything*, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG 27).

It is an epoch-making declaration with far reaching impacts. The Church and Religious life, sadly, have been diagnosed as being scandalously in self-preservation mode. We have hid ourselves in bunkers and hoped to survive. The pope invites us to come out of our private sanctuaries and to take up anew a Christ-like mission in the world. He diagnoses the wounds of that world and finds them self-inflicted. He tells us to look up from our narcissism and to approach the sacred ground of the other. The Pope urges all in the Church to flourish by choosing a missionary option that transforms everything than to engage in survival tactics. More than ever, today, there is an impelling need within the Church and Religious Life to rediscover the joy of the Gospel by encountering Jesus personally and as a community, and to spread the fragrance that comes from knowing him (2 Cor 2:14).

2. A CALL FOR ALL

The invitation to discover the joy of the Gospel is addressed to all Christians. Therefore it is a rallying call for all the missionaries and Consecrated people who are committed to the Gospel living and proclamation. Pope Francis writes: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace” (EG3).

It is fulfilling to be an evangelizer! It is exhilarating to go out and into the existential peripheries where we can be and bring Good News! Christ through His Vicar is summoning us to “leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others”. Why? Because, Pope Francis states, “When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For ‘here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means’” (EG 10). Every Baptized member of the Catholic faith is called to evangelize and is called to be a missionary disciple. Therefore the call is to grow up to become an effectively joyful and loving evangelizer!

3. REDISCOVERING THE JOY OF EVANGELIZING

Holy Father realizes with pain the fact that the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing has diminished in the heart of the Church. He picks up the string from the Gospel to remind the whole Church of this great joy found in the parables of lost coin, lost sheep and lost son (Lk 15). Jesus the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person (EG 209), himself the Good News of God and the very first and the greatest evangelizer (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 7), wished to clearly show us what real joy is all about -*the joy of salvation* (cf. Ps 51:14; 1 Pt 1:6-9).

Each parable of lost and found concludes with an astonishing statement which seemingly is forgotten, is brought to our attention as we enter into *Evangelii Gaudium*. Jesus assures us that this lost-and-found business is so central to the

Gospel message and proclamation that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Jesus closes these parables with a truly hope-filled assurance for all who know they need divine and human mercy: “we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (Luke 15:7,10, 32). The father like the other two individuals were “jubilant” and invite all to “Rejoice with me!” because they had found what was lost, the dead had come back to life, and what was saved was now safe (cf. *GE* 9).

It is this joy of the Gospel the Holy Father speaks about that spreads in and through the Church, through each consecrated person, knowing that Christ is our joy. Joy is such an important and constitutive element of the Christian life and of the proclamation of the Gospel that Pope Paul VI wrote an entire Apostolic Exhortation on Christian Joy, *Gaudete in Domino*² to which Pope Francis refers in his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, on The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (also known as The Joy of the Gospel).

3.1. Fundamentals of Evangelizing with Joy

a) Joy emerging from renewed and enriching friendship with Jesus

We evangelize with joy because “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.” Both the evangelizer and the evangelized, “who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew” (*EG* 1). We cannot effectively evangelize if we are “Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter” (*EG* 6). The exhortation inspires us to experience daily the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing because we have first encountered Love Incarnate: Jesus Christ: “Thanks solely to this encounter—or renewed encounter—with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (*EG* 8).

Evangelii Gaudium challenges us to show forth the fruit of the encounter with Jesus. Pope Francis writes: we, the evangelizers, “must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” Rather, “Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that ‘delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching,

sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EG 10).

b) *Love impels us to evangelize*

The Apostolic Exhortation is filled with references to the undeniable and very necessary call to love. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: ‘The love of Christ urges us on’ (2 Cor 5:14); ‘Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16). A person who loves Christ and his message has a heart to receive Christ into it and *heart-enlarged disciples become loving missionaries—missionary disciples!* (cf. EG 9, 24, 119, 120, 173). Such a person will proclaim Gospel joyfully for the love of God and neighbor whose good he seeks. A lover of Christ knows that the world needs the fascinating and awe-inspiring Person of Christ! Indeed, the Pope says, “The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ” (EG 11). This renewed approach to evangelize from the joy of loving reminds everyone at the same time that in every activity of evangelization, primacy always belongs to God (not to the evangelizer) and the life of the Church witnesses clearly the initiative of God, knowing that “he loved us first” (1 Jn 4:19). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life to go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us” (EG 12).

c) *Ever ancient ever new*

The new evangelization that the Pope speaks is ancient and new at the same time. We humbly proclaim the Gospel with joy in *continuity of faith* with and grateful remembrance of others who have gone before us: “this remembrance makes present to us ‘a great cloud of witnesses’ (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: ‘Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God’ (Heb 13:7).” We shall not forget from whence we come and where we are going! And as Pope Francis challenges us to “embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” and to adopt “new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” (cf. EG 1, 11, 31, 288), there is hope rather than fear. He envisions “the newness of this mission as entailing a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history which surrounds us and carries us forward” (EG 13). We should appear as people who wish to share

their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but “by attraction” (EG 14). Learning from all those who have gone before us in announcing the Gospel, we are inspired to proclaim the Gospel of joy filled with love and make it new.

3.2 Stimuli for a Renewed Missionary Impulse

Besides presenting the elements of the joyful proclamation of the Gospel, Pope Francis engages himself in enlisting certain fundamental impetuses for such a renewed approach which call for the urgent attention of everyone. Above all he urges all to cultivate an interior space which gives meaning to our commitment and mission. The Pope writes: “Spirit filled evangelizers are evangelizers who work and pray. Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out” (EG 262).

Holy Father is not weary of highlighting the importance of genuine prayer in the work of evangelization. “The Church urgently needs deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God’s Word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life.” At the same time he cautions the dangers of false spiritual life as a cover up for our inaction. Listen to what the pope says: “Even so, we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill-accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the incarnation. There is always the risk that some moments of prayer can become an excuse for not offering one’s life in mission; a privatized lifestyle can lead Christians to take refuge in some false forms of spirituality” (EG 262).

The Exhortation proposes the following in order to rediscover the missionary enthusiasm along with the encouragement to imitate the saints who have gone before us, who have confronted the difficulties of their own day:

a) Personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus

The Pope asks: What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? Therefore, the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. At the same time the Holy Father realizes with grief that the dearth of sanctity of this personal love relationship in an intimate encounter with Jesus, costs the evangelizing spirit of the Church, Religious and missionary communities. Hence, he appeals to all, “if

we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. Standing before him with open hearts, let him look at us! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life!” (EG 263).

This renewed experience of savouring Christ’s friendship and his message will convince him to be a true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, and works with him. He senses that Jesus is alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise. Unless we see him present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigour and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and not in love will convince nobody (EG 266).

b) The spiritual savour of being a people

The exhortation entreats each one of us to realize that the Lord wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. For that reason he takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity. To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. We begin to realize that Jesus’ gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. The closeness of Jesus to people and his compassionate availability to those in need (cf. Mk 10:21; Mk 10:46-52; Mk 2:16 Mt 11:19; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 3:1-15) finds the culmination on the sacrifice of the cross (cf. EG 269).

Holy Father places this unparalleled tenderness and oneness of Jesus with humanity before every missionary and consecrated person so that it may be absorbed into one’s heart and radiate the joy of this Gospel message. “Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives” (EG 269). This unqualified love of others is a test of the depth and authenticity of our spiritual life. “Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God; indeed, one who does not love others “walks in the darkness” (1 Jn 2:11),

“remains in death” (1 Jn 3:14) and “does not know God” (1 Jn 4:8) (cf. EG 272). Benedict XVI has said in his Encyclical that “closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God”, and that love is, in the end, the only light which “can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working”³ (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16).

Thus, “a committed missionary knows the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others. Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary. This openness of the heart is a source of joy” (EG 272), knowing from the heart “that every person is an object of God’s infinite tenderness and is immensely holy and deserving our love” (EG 274). The conclusion therefore, is that “we do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide” (EG 272).

c) The mysterious working of the risen Christ and his Spirit

Evangelii Gaudium addresses some major difficulties that the missionaries face, namely, pessimism and mistrust. Knowing well the dangers of these attitudes and their deep impact in the present Church scenario, Holy Father decries: “Some people do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. They think: ‘Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won’t see any significant result?’ This attitude makes it impossible to be a missionary. It is only a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness” (EG 275). The remedy offered is to recall the triumph of Christ through his death and resurrection that gives meaning to our preaching and the experience of Risen Lord working with us (cf. 1 Cor 15:14; Mk 16:20).

When we are bested with failures, human weaknesses, discontent, weariness and unhealthy motivations, we do not quit, because we believe in the resurrection. This is faith, according to Pope Francis, that we believe that He truly loves us, that God’s kingdom struggles only to flourish anew and that Christ’s resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for Jesus did not rise in vain (EG 279). Holy Father encourages all of us by saying: “We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, and no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world and function like a vital force of transformation.” All we need to know that the Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills and we humbly entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results (cf. EG 279).

4. CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY TRANSFORMATION

The Apostolic Exhortation analyses objectively the present situation of the world that we live in and identifies the real challenges that we should address individually and communally, as Church and as people of God. Pope Francis has rightly diagnosed a world that has progressed incredibly but gripped by fear and desperation. The struggle for survival casts shadow over the joy of living on account of inequalities, egoism and violence. There are genuine challenges we must stand up to and fight beside the weak and exploited. We need to take courage to leave the onlookers in the gallery and join the men and women in the fray, leaving also our own secure zone and safety bunkers.

4.1. Challenges from the Present World Scenario

These challenges do concern the Church and every missionary. They cannot be sidestepped or ignored. The overview of these challenges should enable us to do some serious introspection as to whether we are aware of the significance of these challenges and/or we are also part of the problem that the world posing before us.

a) Exclusion and Marginalization

The economic and social structure that the world created also produced 'outcasts' and 'left overs' in the society. The Pope asks: "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving?" (EG 53) The unjust structure of exclusion and inequality is rampant that treats human beings as consumer goods to be used and discarded. It is a threat to human life and against God's commandment to safeguard the value of human life.

We, as church and consecrated people need to ask ourselves if we too are part of the problem by our attitudes and approach. The Exhortation places a statement for the serious consideration of every one of us: "To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own" (EG 54). A tough challenge indeed ahead of us! And is anyone listening?

b) Idolatry of money

Evangelii Gaudium raises concerns of the return of the golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) in a new and ruthless guise of the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy that lacks a truly human purpose, and man is reduced to one of his needs alone, i.e. consumption (EG 55). Sadly, money has replaced many human values the society held high in the past. The trends of market autonomy and speculations, and ideologies of self-sufficiency have vanished role of God and face of man from our culture. Holy Father decries this heartbreaking condition which makes the vulnerable more and more defenseless and makes this world an unsuitable place to live. Do we and our institutions fall victims to this enchanting golden calf and move away from the divine plan that desires the joy of living a dignified life for all? It is time to check the infringement of new idols into our lives and mission.

c) Resources for enslaving, not for serving

Another major challenge the world and the Church faces today comes from the way of administering their own resources. There exists, deplorably, the practice of enslaving the susceptible with money power. The Pope sees an ethical crisis behind the manipulative administration of the resources. Quoting St. John Chrysostom, the Pope reminds, “Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs” (EG 57). The Holy Father firmly reminds us that any financial administration that does not respect, help, promote the poor and favour human beings, is challenging God and, in return, challenging our own existence.

d) Inequality igniting violence

If every action has its consequences, evil and inequality embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death, because an unjust structure cannot be the basis of hope for a better future and safe world. This is a challenge that is staring at us all as the Pope says: “When any society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility”(EG 59). We are, therefore, called to realize that the foundation of any peaceful society is justice, which we need to practice in relation to our own life within and in our missionary interaction with the world outside.

4.2. Cultural Challenges

a) Religious hatred and intolerance

Rightly Holy Father recognized the growing universal phenomenon of persecution of Christians. This is a serious cultural challenge that every Christian and missionary faces today. To be a bearer of truth and faith in a hostile environment, we continue to hope for generosity from the part of all that can outgrow personal ambitions and sectarian gains. So long as there is a crisis of ideologies and widespread relativism, intolerance will continue to challenge us. The collective awareness of this challenge will make us more supportive and prepared to face the trials.

b) Pursuit of ‘instant’ and ‘superficial’

The document characterizes today’s culture as a situation where “priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is real gives way to appearances” (EG 62). Quoting Apostolic Exhortations of *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Ecclesia in Asia* the Pope laments that uncritical importing of external influences deteriorates cultural roots, effects emergence of new patterns of behavior, threaten traditional values and sacredness of family and marriage (cf. EG 62). The challenge before us is to examine how much do our doors are open for the external influences and interesting ideologies to creep into our lives that make us more ‘worldly’ and less ‘Consecrated.’

c) New Religious movements

Holy Father terms proliferation of new religious movements as an attempt to propose spirituality without God springing from a materialistic, consumerist and individualistic society. It also reflects the deplorable manner of exploiting the weaknesses of people living in poverty and on the fringes of society; people who make both ends meet amid great human suffering and are looking for immediate solutions to their needs. At the same time, he cautions with due awareness of the fact that there are religious/parish/missionary structures that are unwelcoming and uncharitable towards the people and tend to address the problems of the people in a bureaucratic way. In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach and these types of functioning alienate the baptized flock and they no longer possess a sense of belonging to the Church (EG 63). This is a challenge and calls for genuine introspection.

d) Crisis of Families

Pope Francis identifies the crisis of families to cultural crisis. The weakening of family is of serious concern because the family is the fundamental cell

of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. The shift in the meaning of marriage has aggravated the situation. Growing individualism of postmodern era favours a life style that weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. As Church and communities, our existence today, more than ever, should proclaim that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds (cf. *EG* 66-67). The challenge is to make our existence relevant by being and becoming agents of communion and healing.

e) Challenge to inculturating faith

It is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel. The immense importance of a culture marked by faith cannot be overlooked. An evangelized popular culture contains values of faith and solidarity capable of encouraging the development of a more just and believing society, and possesses a particular wisdom which ought to be gratefully acknowledged. But the fact is that many cultures have abandoned the tradition and the faith and therefore there is a need for growing from traditional devotions and popular piety allowing the Gospel to heal the culture. Holy Father is trying to tell us to pay attention to the reasons for this situation: “The causes of this breakdown include: a lack of opportunity for dialogue in families, the influence of the communications media, a relativistic subjectivism, unbridled consumerism which feeds the market, lack of pastoral care among the poor, the failure of our institutions to be welcoming, and our difficulty in restoring a mystical adherence to the faith in a pluralistic religious landscape (*EG* 70). And it is worth paying attention to these observations!

f) Challenge from urban cultures

A completely new culture has come to life and continues to grow in the cities. The Synod had already noted that today the changes taking place in these great spaces and the culture which they create, are a privileged locus of the new evangelization. In these new environments Christians are no longer the customary interpreters or generators of meaning. In cities religious dimension of life is expressed in different styles as life itself faces struggles for survival. Modern cities have become havens of social evils and places of isolation and mutual distrust. This challenges us to imagine innovative spaces and possibilities for prayer and communion which are more attractive and meaningful for those reside in the cities. The Gospel proclamation to them should be based on restoring human dignity and fraternity (cf. *EG* 71-75).

4.3. Pastoral Challenges

While wholeheartedly and gratefully acknowledging and beautiful example and sacrifice of men and women of the Church in their committed service of the Gospel, Pope Francis raises some concerns that affect the missionaries, pastoral workers and consecrated people.

a) Challenge of a missionary spirituality

The Pope says: “Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity” (EG 78). He adds saying that the spiritual life is identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization, pastoral agents develop fear, cynicism and inferiority complex as a result of a media culture and relativize the message of Christ. This relativism in practice can be very dangerous because “it consists in acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, setting goals as if others did not exist, working as if people who have not received the Gospel did not exist.” This kind of life style leads to attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission” (EG 80). The challenge, therefore, is to maintain our missionary enthusiasm.

b) Selfishness and spiritual sloth

The apostolic exhortation makes a revealing statement: “at a time when we most need a missionary dynamism which will bring salt and light to the world, many people fear that they may be asked to undertake some apostolic work and they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time. Some resist giving themselves over completely to missions though the task of evangelization was a dangerous poison rather than a joyful response to God’s love. Unrealistic projects, lack of patience for the fruit to mature, attachment to projects and dreams, works disconnected from people, fear failures and crosses are some of the reason this plight of the missionaries (EG 82). The pope is inviting all to rediscover the enthusiasm of proclaiming the Gospel.

c) Pessimism

One of the more serious temptations which stifle boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “complainers”. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand.

In the context of the shrinking of Christian population in some countries, violent oppositions in other areas and the Christian world becoming sterile, it is difficult to remain an optimist. Yet the Pope consoles us by saying we need to march on keeping in mind what the Lord said to Saint Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9; cf. *EG* 85). We need to persevere in hope knowing that in these situations we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink.

d) *Spiritual worldliness*

Holy Father explains this term as a tendency which hides behind the appearance of piety and even a love for the Church, but seeks not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being. It is a subtle way of seeking one’s “own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:21). This spiritual worldliness can be fuelled by a subjective faith that is interested only in certain ideas and an ultimate trust in one’s own powers. The danger in this case is “instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others” (*EG* 94). Spiritual worldliness can also appear as ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige (but without any concern that the Gospel has a real impact on God’s faithful people) and as a fascination with social and political gain, or pride in their ability to manage practical affairs or an obsession with self-realization. According to Holy Father, “this is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good. We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor” (*EG* 97).

e) *Warring among ourselves*

The pope expresses his grief over the wars within the people of God and in our communities. He names envy, quest for power, prestige, pleasure, economic security as some of the root causes for the war within Christians and communities. He earnestly appeals to all, in a world that is torn by wars and violence and wounded by individualism, to be witnesses of fraternal communion.

4.3. Ecclesial Challenges

Evangelii Gaudium also enumerates some ecclesial challenges for the attention of all. They include the formation and greater role of the laity in the proclamation of the Gospel, recognizing the indispensable contribution of women, accompanying the young through their needs and concerns, and nurturing vocations to priesthood and consecrated life through the witness of apostolic fervor and the warmth of fraternal life.

5. BE BOLD AND CREATIVE

Pope Francis in this exhortation has made a fundamental proposal of proclaiming the Gospel with joy. He illustrated the proposal with its essential components and challenges in carrying out that proposal. Now it is up to each member of the Church to accept it as a guideline and make sincere effort to revitalize the Church and make the Gospel message relevant and fruitful for the humanity. In his own words the Pope makes this appeal clearly: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear” (*EG* 33). The Pope expects that the missionaries and consecrated people of the Church accept this invitation whole heartedly and respond generously. Because this exhortation is fundamental to our existence as Church and the service we offer as God’s servants to people.

To be creative requires being courageous. According to the Pope, courage is to look at the Church in a groundbreaking way. He says: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.” It is the courage to redefine our traditional fears: “More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are in want (*EG* 49). The courage is to declare that, “no one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas” (*EG* 201). God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Cor 8:9). “Without the preferential option for the poor, ‘the proclamation of the Gospel, which itself is the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications’” (*EG* 199).

Courage will not conceal in consoling oneself saying that things are not as easy as they used to be. Every period of history is marked by the presence of human weakness, selfishness and crisis. The Pope asks us to have the courage to say, ‘times are hard today, but times have always been hard; and things are not harder today, they are simply different’ (*EG* 263).

Courage in proclaiming Christ also means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties (cf. *EG* 167). The Exhortation gives emphatic importance to homilies as beautiful way of proclaiming Gospel: “We know that the faithful attach great importance to it, and that both they and their ordained ministers suffer because of homilies: the laity from having to listen to them and the clergy from having to preach them!” (*EG* 135) A preacher who does not prepare is not “spiritual”; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received (*EG* 145). Hence the Holy Father reminds: Every catechesis and every homily would do well to attend to the ‘way of beauty’ (*EG* 129). Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus.

6. MARY, MOTHER OF EVANGELIZATION

At the conclusion of the Exhortation, Holy Father takes us to Mary, Mother of Evangelization and entrusts this renewed initiative under her guidance. Mary’s prayer with the disciples in anticipation of the descent of the Holy Spirit ‘made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost.’ The pontiff firmly declares that without the Mother of God, “we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization” (*EG* 284). She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life, opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love. As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God’s love. Therefore Pope Francis concludes the *Evangelii Gaudium* by entrusting this mission to Mary’s intercession, who is able to recognize the traces of God’s Spirit in events great and small and constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives: “We ask the Mother of the living Gospel to intercede that this invitation to a new phase of evangelization will be accepted by the entire ecclesial community (*EG* 287).

CONCLUSION

“The evangelization preached by *Evangelii Gaudium* will surely be a challenge to many around the world, to the powerful, to the rich, to all ideologies, to all Christians, especially a wake-up call for all pastoral agents and consecrated people. Certainly in those areas of the Church in which many of the faithful have ceased practicing the faith, Pope Francis’ message is very timely. But even in areas of great growth, there is the danger of a sterile institutionalization, where the mission of the Church is looked at as a phase until the Church becomes fully established in parish, schools, hospitals, service centers and more. Holy Father

is saying that missionary outreach must permanently become the paradigm of everything the Church does, because the chief illness that plagues the Church is self-enclosed, self-absorbed, self-centered introversion. That means that institutions throughout the Church — from the papacy to chanceries, to parishes to all other missions and apostolates — need to go through a thorough self-examination to ensure that they're about mission instead of maintenance. For Supreme Pontiff, this is the fundamental reform the Church needs, the principal way the Church needs to be brought “into shape” again.

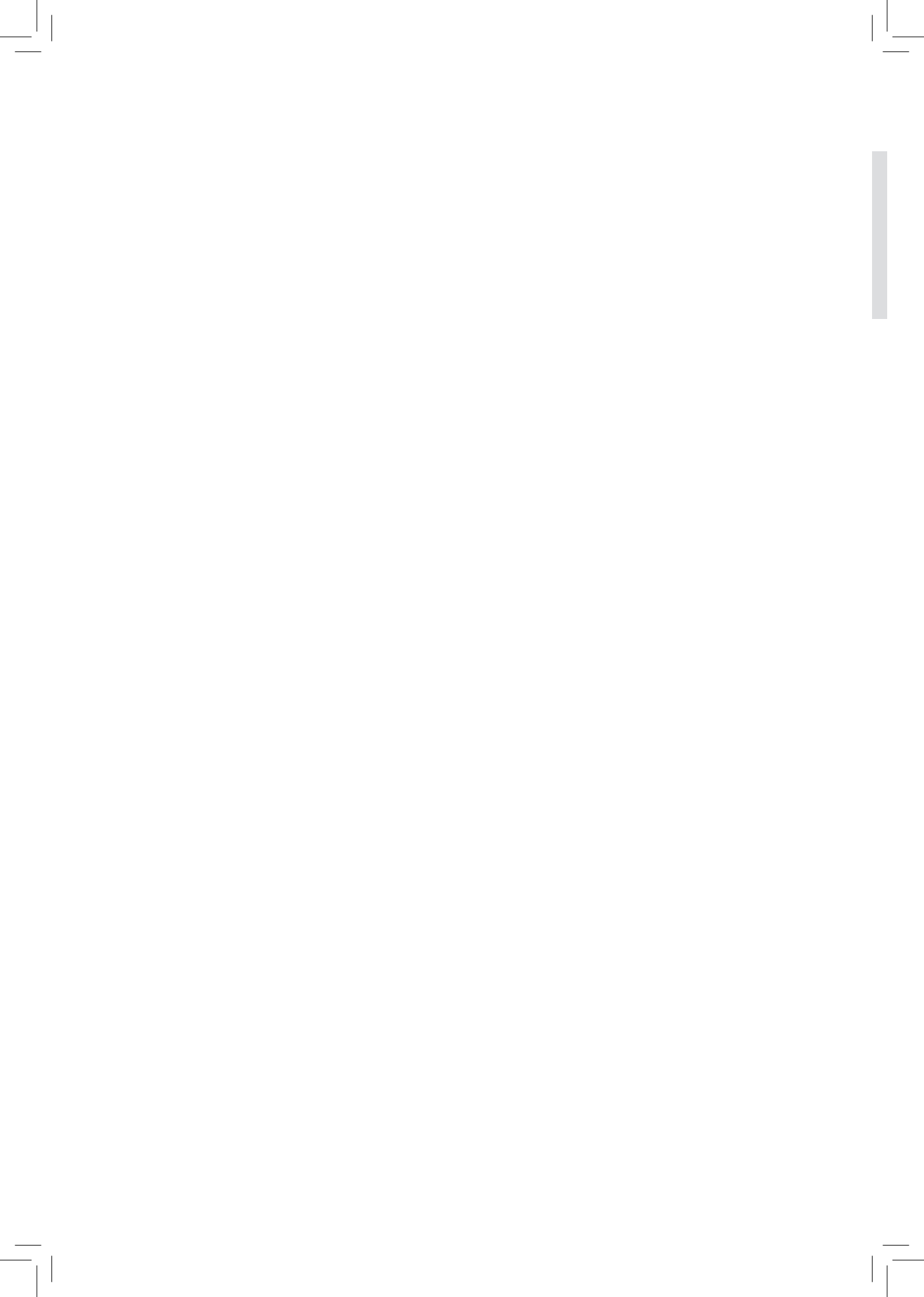
The Pope encourages all by assuring of Lord's unfailing compassion and upholding to go ahead in spite of all challenges and human frailties: “With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, Jesus makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what may. May nothing inspire more than His life, which impels us onwards” (EG 3).

Endnotes

1. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 November 2013.
2. Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino* Apostolic Exhortation, 22
3. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical Letter, 16.

References

1. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, 1975.
2. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mission*, Encyclical Letter, 1990.
3. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 1988.
4. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 1992.
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NEW HORIZONS FOR THE MISSION OF CONSECRATED LIFE¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

Whenever we speak of *mission*, we are obviously speaking about something more than a series of apostolic activities. The mission goes beyond a series of concrete apostolic works, since it brings together different dimensions of our life, which it entirely called to be the proclamation of the news of God's Kingdom. The mission is at the center of consecrated life and of the identity of every Institute. The Pope reminded us Superiors General of this in his reflection during the Audience he granted us on 2012 November, "The mission is the way of being of the Church, and in it, of Consecrated Life; it is part of your identity." Charisms are gifts of the Spirit for the good of the whole Church so that she may grow in her journey of faith, build true fraternity and carry out the mission of bearing witness to and proclaiming the Kingdom.

The fundamental mission of consecrated life and of each Institute is *the mission of the Church, the only one that Jesus entrusted to his disciples*. In this regard, it is "our" mission, although the "our" goes beyond the limits of our Congregation or Institute. It is the mission of the Church, which in keeping with Jesus' commandment, continues to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to all men and women, serving the cause of those to whom she belongs, like Jesus. This means the poor, peace workers, those who work to promote justice and those who suffer. It is the mission which Jesus entrusted to his disciples and that is expressed in the Gospel through different "missionary commandments" such as proclaim the Good news to all people (cf. Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15); be the witnesses of the Resurrection (cf. Lk 24:46-48; Acts 1,8); be the bearers of peace and reconciliation (cf. Jn 20:21-23); heal the sick and help the excluded (cf. Lk 10:1-9); be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-16), love one another; even as I have loved you (cf. Jn 13:34-35), etc. It is a

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mission that presents different dimensions and takes on different forms in the various contexts in which it is carried out. Ultimately, it is *Jesus' mission*, which He himself presented through the words of the book of the prophet Isaiah, who in the Synagogue in Nazareth proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19).

Actually, it is also the *mission that God entrusted to all of humankind*, in other words, the mission to care for his creatures and build a history of fraternity and solidarity, as we discover in the accounts of Creation and the pages of the Scriptures, especially in the preaching of the Prophets.

However, to properly understand the theme of mission, *we must go back to its Trinitarian roots*. The mission comes from the very insides of God Abba. Abba generates the Son in eternity and sends Him to us in order for Him to be incarnated in history. The Son is he who has been sent, and fulfils the mission that the Father had entrusted to Him. This "filial" mission, however, is not the only one that is born of God's inner organs. There is another mission, which flows from the Son like living water (cf. Jn 7: 37-39) and that comes from the Father (Jn 15:26): it is the mission of the Spirit. This mission continues to be fulfilled in the history of the world until the end of time. We confess that our God-Trinity is a "shared mission" and in his plan of love, he has associated us with it, just as he has associated us with the single filiation of the Son and with the charismatic mission of the Spirit. The Church's mission is thus relieved of the excessive burden of being responsible for results and becomes a visible extension of God's mission, which is always a manifestation of his incommensurable love². We could speak of a paradigm shift, as a result of which rather than conceiving the mission mainly as *Missio Ecclesiae*, we now see it much more clearly as participation in the *Missio Dei*.

The mission is born of the experience of a God who is communion and communication, who is love and that fills us with this love, which overflows in us and tries to become widespread. Jesus' missionary commandment echoes the communion of the Trinitarian love; it is an invitation to give to it a concrete expression in time and space, under the impulse of the Spirit. The Church makes sense only as an instrument to communicate that love. In this way it participates in the *Missio Dei*, although it does not exhaust or monopolize it.

It is with this mission that "we associate ourselves". In fulfilling the mission of the Church, consecrated life and each Institute in particular will have to give

visibility to whatever they are responsible for. We will have to determine what contribution each of us should make, how to harmonize our charisms, how to put our actions together in favour of a common project, which is crucial for the future of humankind.

2. THE MISSION IN THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY

The theme of mission was naturally discussed at the Seminar on the Theology of Apostolic Religious Life. It is not up to me to present the comments that were made there, but I will share with you some of the observations that emerged during the symposium. I will try to summarize some of the most significant discussions which took place in that forum, and future perspectives which might emerge following the reflections of the seminar. I will do so on the basis of the perspective offered to us by the 2004 Congress on Consecrated Life, i.e. a life characterized by the “passion for Christ and the passion for humankind”. First of all, we must place at the center of our concern and reflection people’s lives, their hopes and struggles, their intuitions and questions; we are to look at the world through the compassionate eyes of our Lord and let ourselves be guided by this compassion as we define our response to the challenges that lie ahead. The images of the Samaritan woman and man still today are a point of reference for our reflection. We continue to deem it necessary to dynamically harmonize a contemplative mercy with an engaged contemplation. With *Vita Consecrata*, we believe that consecrated life should continue to be an epiphany of God’s love, and we know full well that this manifestation has occurred and always occurs through kenosis.

3. A FEW CHALLENGES

The word that probably best summarizes the different challenges that were discussed is the word “*change*”. This is nothing new, for history in general and the history of our Institutes in particular, has shown us that significant changes have characterized all periods. However, there is the awareness that we are going through a time in which this change is happening at a faster pace, and its consequences are felt very intensely in the life of our Institutes and in their apostolic projection.

We are witnessing a sea of change. We are really changing in terms of values, relations, institutions and systems. The change under way is radical and is questioning the very methodology we have been accustomed to using to address problems and consider new opportunities. It is a change that takes on different expressions according to the context, and we are often unable to define them.

These transformations generate crises and crises produce insecurity. There is a growing *lack of confidence* in existing institutions, which have contributed to the development of our present civilization, and that are perceived as a hindrance or obstacle in this epochal transition. This is a phenomenon that we are witnessing in society at large, but also within the Church and Consecrated Life.

However, crises also reawaken a new awareness which generates *expectations* in all those persons that have experienced inequality, oppression, and exclusion in the existing institutions and encourage ways to overcome these situations through participatory inclusion. The challenge, therefore, is to support these individuals and groups, to help keep their hope alive, and not to thwart generous and brave efforts with our inhibition.

It is thus important to try to identify the aspects that this change is challenging most radically for each religious, for our communities and for their mission. The first step cannot but be for us to look at the world around us and try to listen to the voices we hear. We shall have to give a name to the fears and hopes that these challenges generate within us and in our communities. We will also have to make an additional effort to reflect and be creative to find answers that speak to the heart of the contemporary man and woman and fulfill the mission of being transforming elements of culture (cf. EN 20).

3.1. Globalization

One main aspect characterizing the historical time in which we live is globalization, which has eliminated all distances and has brought persons and peoples closer together. It has also been able to set in motion initiatives and movements of a different nature that have rapidly crossed national and cultural borders. This is an ambiguous reality, which presents great potential in terms of its ability to create strong networks of solidarity, but also poses the real threat of being manipulated by those who show off power in the effort to consolidate and multiply it. For example, we have seen that globalization allows those who have money to multiply their resources, in a market that may be controlled at a distance so that people do not have to travel, they don't have to move or go far from those who will suffer the consequences of decisions taken to make greater profit. The cry of the excluded is not heeded directly, and their faces are seen only from a certain distance. Globalization is proving to be a phenomenon that excludes and which seeks to impose certain ways of thinking and values. It is also expressed through increasingly massive migration movements that are changing our world's human geography. The suburbs of large cities become difficult to define from a cultural point of view, and they are often torn by

conflict. Globalization is a phenomenon that tends to standardize everything on the basis of criteria that are imposed, that do not respect differences and that exclude those who do not adapt.

To a certain extent, the phenomenon of globalization is also one which we experience in the Church and in our own Congregations, which are increasingly multicultural and multicentric. Both the Church and our Orders and Congregations have a long experience with “catholicity”. Certainly, we cannot deny that imposition and exclusion have been part of our history. We acknowledge them with pain and have tried to learn from them. Building a communion that will integrate differences is one of the greatest challenges facing our communities. In this patient and loving exercise, we learn the language with which we can speak to our globalized world in a credible manner. On this journey, we also discover the obstacles that must be overcome in order to live out and build a communion that will integrate differences.

We should ask ourselves what is the perspective through which we look at globalization and what are our attitudes and actions in this context. We will have to think about the type of solidarity with which we will have to build our future, and which networks should be used to promote a transformation of the world according to God’s heart. Ultimately, all this will compel us to think about how, through our lives and works, we can be parables that awaken in others the longing for the communion which respects and integrates differences.

These are questions that concern us, and at the same time urge us to seek new ways of evangelization. We should think about the way in which the experience of vows and fraternal life in community can become signs which speak of inclusion and solidarity in our globalized world.

3.2. Cultural and Religious Pluralism

Another phenomenon challenging our missionary projection is the new awareness of cultural and religious pluralism. Globalization itself has put in contact many different cultures and religions. The tendency to standardize everything, which characterizes the globalization process, has produced a number of strong movements which affirm certain cultures. They command respect and try to protect themselves, sometimes with fundamentalist-like attitudes, as they feel threatened by other cultures especially the dominant ones.

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue is as stimulating as it is difficult. The missionary history of our own Institutes warns us about this. The new awareness about cultural and religious pluralism poses alarming questions. In a world essentially marked by religious pluralism, the proclamation of the Christian

message of God, who saves us through Christ, resonates in a different way. In the midst of new anthropological, cultural, social and religious paradigms, the Church is confronted with new missionary challenges. The dialogue with cultures, and especially with the other religious Traditions, leads us to discover new ways of posing the fundamental questions of meaning and allows us to contemplate the beauty of the responses provided progressively throughout history. The experience of universal fraternity is extended and reinforced, and at the same time, the experience of God's paternity/maternity is deepened. Accompanied by Jesus, we recognize the love of the Father in the "words" that progressively filled with meaning and hope the journey of so many brothers and sisters of ours. To live as disciples of Jesus, for all to have life, is the great task that may be carried out in a credible way only on the basis of total gratuitousness. A life totally given to God should create in consecrated persons a special sensitivity enabling them to capture the signs of his presence, and the great ability to follow His calls through the richness of cultures and religious Traditions to which we belong. All this should be part of our service to the Church.

Might this new awareness be asking us to walk down a two-way street? On the one hand, we are called to walk together with believers of other religious traditions and with those who belong to a different cultural universe, *towards Jesus*, "the Way, the Truth and the Life", who reveals to us the Heart of the Father. On the other hand, we are called to journey *with Jesus and starting from Him*, to reach out to the religious and human experience of these persons and people. In that experience, we are to discover the merciful face of the Father, who invites us to broaden our horizons and enables us to know him more deeply for what he really is, i.e., *The Father and Mother of all*. All this has an impact on the way in which we live out our consecration and direct our missionary action.

3.3. The Challenge of Secularity

One of the traits that has characterized culture for many years now, especially in certain parts of the world although it is expanding in an unstoppable way, is the strong assertion of the autonomy of the secular. We are actually speaking of secularization processes that are challenging traditional religiosity and the way in which many people live out their faith. In many of these people, this phenomenon has even caused the transcendental to disappear from their lives. It is something that is gradually determining the construction of a culture and a world in which God is no longer necessary, and in which his presence is no longer deemed to be of any use.

In any event, secularization is a process that also has some positive sides, as it recognizes the freedom, dignity and autonomy of man and his rights.

Secularization is a great opportunity to purify the image of God and the functions of religious persons. It cleanses whatever is religious from social, political and ideological manipulation. It places whatever is sacred and holy there where they are placed by the Gospel and Jesus' experience. However, secularization becomes negative when it refuses to be open towards God, rejects any contact with Him and refuses to live God's incommensurable life here and now. At that point, it obfuscates the horizon of the human being's life and confines him to a place in which it is difficult to experience God's love, the love that enables people to love and fills their lives with meaning and hope. Secularization has also come to affect consecrated persons. It is not only a pastoral problem, but an existential issue, for it penetrates our depths, like the air that we breathe.

Consecrated life has related to the world in different ways in the various periods of history. At first, there was the *fuga mundi*, after which consecrated persons tried to "recreate the world" which was crumbling as a result of the fall of a pre-established social order and its institutions. Emphasis was then placed on "conquering the world" for Christ, through the deployment of missionaries. Congregations, with their charisms, then tried to "serve the world", and later emphasized the need to "face the world", denouncing those forms of organization and dominion which caused the exclusion of many, etc. In each one of these ways of relating to the world, there is a particular way of understanding the world and the mission of the Church. Over time, consecrated life has learned to look at the world in a new light and to relate to it in friendly terms, because it is cognizant of the fact that this world is "loved by God, to the extent that he gave the world his only Son". The relationship with the world is an important element when reflecting on the mission of consecrated life. Engaging with the world does not mean giving up before the challenge of secularization. Consecrated life wants to continue to pose the question regarding God's existence, but it must do so in a way that is comprehensible to the men and women of secularized societies. Spirituality has become much more incarnated in life, and consecrated persons have realized that one does not enter into contact with God's mystery in sacred places alone, but there wherever our Lord is incarnated, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

All this is about the way in which the eschatological dimension of consecrated life is lived out. It is the witness of the world that will come, and anticipates and makes visible the goods that we expect. However, in a healthy Christian eschatology, the present and the future cannot be set against each other, and they certainly cannot be opposed. We Christians await the future of life, a life that has always been and will always be a gift of God, not simply another life. We

await the future of the world, a world that is God's gift, which we are to respect and share; we are not simply awaiting just another world. The more intense our hope for a future life is, the more we are committed to transforming the present world, according to God's plan. In so doing, we take on board this fundamental dimension of consecrated life.

In the context of the mission, this opens up an important area of collaboration with the laity, especially those with whom we share the same charismatic legacy. With them, we are committed to a process which begins with looking at reality together, according to a perspective that is enriched by the particular vantage point of those who live out their Christian vocation as consecrated persons and those who live it out as lay persons. We know that the latter "emphasize" the secular nature of the Church's mission, and that the religious emphasize its eschatological nature. In the ecclesial communion, the laity underscores the value, according to God's plan, of the things with which we deal in our daily lives, namely work, the family, politics, etc. While recognizing the importance of all these aspects, with our life we religious show how important it is to be aware that what really matters lies beyond all this. We cannot center our lives on "the things of God", and forget the "God of all things". In this interaction, we look at the world and let ourselves be questioned by it. As we seek answers to the challenger that we discover, we grow in our ability to dialogue with the secularized culture in which we live, and we feel called to help others to discover a God that does not compete with man, but places all his skills at the service of the common good, communion and beauty.

We feel the responsibility of reflecting on the meaning for us of the challenge of secularity. How can our life and our apostolic activities challenge people to think about God, and how can they be an eschatological sign, thus overcoming all forms of dualism which blur the true image of God and of the human being? The reality of our world invites us to look for a language that is capable of communicating the richness of the Gospel message in a secularized culture and in the different cultural milieus in which we live.

3.4. Seeking True Harmony

It has often been repeated that fragmentation is another trait which characterizes this particular cultural moment, and perhaps this phenomenon has become even more accentuated in the so-called post-modern culture. Fragmentation is something that we experience in the personal, communitarian, ecclesial and social sphere, with different nuances according to the place. It would seem that the certainties which kept together firmly the different dimensions of personality or that gave a strong sense of identity to those who belonged to a group or a

community cannot withstand the upheavals caused by the new cultural trends. We also see the human community torn by an endless escalation of scandalous inequalities, which clash with the thirst for communion that exists in the heart of every human being and cause violence and death. Rebuilding harmony in the different spheres of life is an urgent challenge.

We are not concerned by differences. On the contrary, they are a beautiful experience because they reveal the harmony that God gave to us in Creation. However, it breaks our heart to see this harmony being shattered by the selfishness and greed of those who feel they are the owners of the things God gave us to share. We long for that harmony that integrates diversity and makes all feel like they are the heirs of the same heritage, because they look at reality through the eyes of God. Religious Life is also a way to rebuild this harmony in the heart of the individual, in relations between persons and people, in the joyful experience of belonging to the wonderful universe created by God and in which we all need one another. Placing ourselves at the service of this harmony is a way for us to live out our vocation in the world. True harmony is built from the grassroots, it is created when the “excluded” feel “included”, and when justice and fraternity are practices in everyday life. We know that the real Christian community is that in which the small are at the center; that is why it is capable of living in true harmony (cf. Mt 18: 1-5).

We feel the urgent need to listen to and introduce into our reflections and in our missionary projection the holistic life of people in their different contexts, with a particular focus on the emergence of different and often excluded identities (youths, indigenous peoples, women, etc.) and violent situations. This process of immersion in the different situations and of dialogue poses new questions and opens up new horizons to our missionary work. It requires new languages and compels us to look for ways in which we can place our charisms at the service of life, people and the Church.

All continents and all peoples appear with the richness of their wisdom and their aspirations for the future. However, they also carry the wounds of a history which witnessed phases of violence and created various types of exclusions that continue to obfuscate their reality. It is a scandal that some people still suffer the consequences of injustice in our world. All this challenges us and requires that we seek new ways to rebuild the harmony we have lost.

4. SEEKING WAYS FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE

Drawing inspiration from the reflection that took place at the conference, I will try to share with you some thoughts regarding possible avenues in the future

to consolidate the apostolic dimension of consecrated life. I will also try to echo some of the questions that have emerged.

4.1. Our First Contribution to the Mission is to deepen the Theological Dimension of our Life

We feel very small before the challenges with which reality is confronting us. In some areas, we see that the number of members of our Institutes is decreasing considerably. Moreover, future projections are somewhat alarming. On the other hand, it would seem that our presence in the societies that have attained a considerable degree of economic progress and social well-being has become insignificant. The services we offer through our works, are also being offered by others, and their quality is good. There are innumerable platforms from which youths can freely express their ideals like serving others and being committed to change the world. Elsewhere, mission patterns of the past are being replicated and are likely to lead to the same crossroads. What is then the meaning of our mission? In asking this question, we feel compelled to go back to the core essence of our vocation and recover the theological dimension that gives meaning to our life and everything that we do. Being centered in God and his plan allows us to discover ways in which we can restore significance to our works and activities, in a world that seems to be fine without Him or that at times even tries to manipulate Him.

The experience of God brings us close to the essence of human persons, it forces us to hear their cries and express sympathy for their search. It makes us discrete in our journeying with them and helps us to appreciate the rich answers that people find progressively along the way. The experience of God compels us to approach the poor and the excluded, it invites us to be their travel companions and creates within us a space of freedom which allows us to look at our life and works in the light of their circumstances. The experience of God awakens in us a new ecologic and cosmic awareness that leads us to feel solidarity with all of Creation and respectful of the dynamisms that the Creator himself has established. A profound experience of God fine-tunes our sensitivity and enables us to capture his presence in the life of people and cultures and to place ourselves at their service. It makes us less dogmatic and more ready to serve. The experience of God is the only force capable of arousing that hope that never dies, in spite of the many difficulties and of giving impetus to our commitment towards life.

This experience of God always occurs in a concrete context, and consequently, it is constantly threatened by the questions and doubts that arise in such a context. In this respect, it makes us sympathize with the doubts and searches of

others, and becomes an important guide when we wish to analyze the traits of the religiosity of our time and its many forms of expression.

Our first contribution to the mission of the Church will therefore be to deepen the theological dimension of our lives. The reflection of the symposium repeatedly underscored this fundamental dimension, which not only refers to the spiritual sphere, but also has a decisive impact on the missionary projection of our communities and the activities of our Institutes.

Theology is asked to undertake a systematic reflection on the new expressions of religiosity in our world in general, and in the different geographic and cultural contexts in which the Church carries out her mission. As religious called to be present in the frontline and as heirs of specific charisms, we will have to make an effort to imagine ourselves in this new sphere of religious awareness and define our contribution to the fulfilment of the Church's mission.

We are thus being asked to undertake a deeper reflection on the experience of God of religious persons and how this forges their lives and is concretely expressed in their apostolic projection. As we look at the world from God's perspective, listening closely to what our travel companions are saying in this moment of history, we ask ourselves, *what is the meaning of our works? What questions should we be asking ourselves to give a true evangelical meaning to our missionary projects, in the different contexts in which we live and work? Which criteria should we use to evaluate the activities that we are carrying out, namely parishes, social works, educational institutions, etc.? What must we do so that people will start asking themselves questions about God's existence, and how can we introduce them to the experience of his love, which liberates and fills with hope?*

4.2. Dialogue as a Place of Mission

We must change our conception of dialogue as a simple "method" to carry out the mission, to a vision of dialogue as the "place" of mission. First of all, this requires that we place people and their predicaments at the center of our concerns. It requires that we immerse ourselves completely into the questions that fill people's lives, and with them look for the answers that can give meaning to this moment in history. This we do by bearing the message of Jesus in our heart, actions and words, knowing however that the first thing Jesus did was to listen to and become part of the history of his people, the history of humanity. It is a "dialogue of life" which can listen and tune in to the needs of others, that gradually discovers the words that it should utter at each moment in order to be a true bearer of life.

A frank dialogue involves a careful consideration of reality, analysis and reflection. It requires preparation and an attitude of openness to the contributions of other sciences and schools of thought, in an interdisciplinary effort which can give it some substance. Dialogue cannot be carried out without a great sense of humility, without recognizing one's own limits and be sensitive to other people's questions and attitudes. Our goal is not to increase our sphere of power or influence, but to walk together to fulfil the dream of the Father for his children and for all of Creation. Such a dialogue cannot take place unless each one of us deeply believes that in Jesus we can find the answer to the concerns threatening the human heart. This belief can only come as a consequence of the concrete experience of the encounter with Christ. In Him we have found the Word of Life, which fills us with hope.

This sort of dialogue urges us to reach out to those who belong to other religious traditions, to those who have a different way of living their lives, and to the concerns, hopes and struggles of us all. It takes the focus away from us so that we can turn our attention mainly to the life and reality of the world. Strangely enough, this will center us much more on God's plan for his children, and on the "things of the Father" (cf. Lk 2:49).

Dialogue requires being open to the surprises along the way, and also demands creativity. Consecrated life and each one of the Institutes that incarnate it know that a wonderful heritage is available to them, namely many centuries of experience with proclaiming the Gospel. It is precisely this heritage that gives us the security and peace of mind we need to enter into an open and frank dialogue. However, we are aware of the need to adopt a new language that can convey the unfathomable and permanent richness of the Gospel message. We are to convey a Word, that of the Word of God who became man, and who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life". It is a creative and life-giving Word, and we know we must continue to listen to it and discover it in all the ways in which it resonates in the heart of persons and peoples. It is a Word that we have meditated upon, lived and proclaimed in very different contexts, for many centuries. This enables us to continue to look for new ways to express and communicate it. We feel the need to speak about ourselves in a new way that will be more comprehensible to the people with whom we share the commitment to build history today, with a language that is capable of touching their lives. We know that this new language will see the light only through a frank and open dialogue with these people, with their struggles and achievements, as well as their questions and answers.

Many extremely interesting experiences are happening in this respect. I think that making such experiences known, along with the questions which they pose,

the concerns they generate and solutions they suggest, would render a great service to all of Consecrated Life and to the evangelizing action of the Church. It would also help us to find new ways of bearing witness to an “alternative” world, according to the heart of the Father, through our vows. It would help us create new thrusts of community life, capable of proclaiming more powerfully the news of the Kingdom, and to better meet the needs of the eschatological dimension which our way of life is called to emphasize in the context of the life of the ecclesial community.

There are experiences of interreligious dialogue, of insertion into the youth world, of a presence in academic and research spheres, of the retrieval of cultural traditions that had been cast aside for many centuries, whose richness is helping us to rediscover fundamental elements of faith. We know that evangelization must necessarily find different languages in the different cultural, social and geographic contexts. Therefore, we do not fear diversity, which instead we consider to be enriching. True evangelization requires a process of inculturation and dialogue with these realities. It is aware of its vocation to be salt and leaven, it is able to walk with Jesus and be attentive to the persons with whom it is journeying. We must continue to work to produce a new theology of the world and of the mission, and a vision of the mission of Consecrated Life in this context.

Are we perhaps still too concerned with ourselves and our works? How are we affected by the predicament and experiences of so many people we meet along the way? What do they cause us to discover, how do they challenge us, in what way do they stimulate us? What are the traits of a new “language” which in its different dimensions and expressions can help us to proclaim Jesus Christ and convey the Good News of the Gospel message in today’s world and in its different scenarios? What are the new approaches and strategies required by the context of religious and cultural pluralism which so greatly characterizes our world today? Which issues should we analyze in greater depth and which attitudes should we encourage? Which evangelizing structures should we privilege in such a context? Which special traits should characterize consecrated life in its apostolic projection in the different continents? What experience can we share starting with our Institutes?

4.3. The Option for the Poor and the Excluded and the Commitment for Justice

Those who are called to be witnesses of the Beatitudes and signs of God’s plan for his children feel deeply challenged by attitudes of injustice and exclusion, so widely present in our world today. The option for the poor and the commitment for

justice have become part of the praxis and theological reflection of Consecrated Life. This option is related to the dynamics of love lived according to Christ. The challenge for Consecrated Life is finding a way in which consecrated persons can promote justice, on the basis of their identity. This implies, on their part, being ready to constantly review their life-choices, their use of goods and the style of their relationships.

And here, the challenge of a socio-political commitment comes into the picture. The political dimension of Christian love, which seeks to transform structures so that justice may be done to the oppressed, has taken a more concrete shape in the awareness of the Church and of Consecrated Life. Consecrated Life wishes to express its commitment to justice through a style of life and an apostolic action that go to the very root of domination and oppression, in the attempt to create and consolidate a truly inclusive world, in which no-one is marginalized from human fraternity. The credibility of the message proclaimed by the Gospel is partly at stake here. A commitment of this sort can only be honoured through inner freedom, which creates absolute and definitive self-giving to God and his plan of salvation. This commitment will lead us to discover new horizons in our experience of religious consecration.

We see this in the situation we have been experiencing in recent times. Perhaps never before has the word “crisis” appeared so many times in means of social communication and rarely have its effects had such a strong impact on people’s lives. The economic crisis has drawn the attention of governments and analysts, and has become a sort of heavy atmosphere, difficult to breathe but impossible to avoid. It has had concrete effects in each one of the places in which we live and work, affecting the lives of individuals and communities. Times of crisis are difficult, but they pose fundamental questions about the values and structures which prevail in our societies. At the same time, they pose new questions which strive for fairer and more inclusive models of relations between persons and peoples. We consecrated persons are inevitably immersed in this dynamics, though at times we are excessively protected by our institutions.

We feel strongly challenged by these situations because we believe in God and in our lives we wish to be faithful to his plan. The Word of God, which is a fundamental point of reference in our lives, constantly challenges us in this respect. However, we must always remember that the Word of God contains a clear hermeneutic perspective, and if we fail to take it on board, it will never really touch our lives. This perspective is God’s love for his children, God’s passion for the poor, the passion which radically marked Jesus’ life, *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* (cf. Lk 4:18). It is a perspective to which we can gain access

only by being close the plight of the poor and the excluded, and by opening our heart and all dimensions of life to the questions that it raises. Our life and our word will not have the ability to proclaim the Gospel, nor will they have a transforming power, unless we approach these realities which bring us back to the core of God's plan for his children. Renewing the option for the poor and the excluded, and being committed to restoring justice are prerequisites to fulfil the mission of consecrated life. It will thus be extremely important to support those projects that are really at their service and collaborate with other persons who dream of a different world in order to create spaces of fraternity and true freedom, in which God is really glorified.

Consecrated life is carrying out many different types of initiatives. Indeed, the testimony of religious men and women, who in spite of difficulties and even after having suffered life-threats, are by the side of the excluded and the poor are one of the most powerful and comprehensible statements made by the Church. Not only do their lives convey a message of solidarity and generosity, but they are also capable of posing questions about the God that inspires them. On the other hand, Institutes and religious Congregations are increasingly present in social and political for a where decisions are taken which affect the life of millions of human beings, like the different agencies of the United Nations Organization, the World Social Forum, etc. Their presence bears witness, with new languages, to their commitment for justice, which is a crucial part of the evangelizing project.

How are the option for the poor and the commitment to justice influencing our style of life and our apostolic choices? In which way do we feel challenged by the problems affecting humankind and the people living by our side? Which new perspectives do they offer us for a theology of vows and of the other essential elements of consecrated life? What are the privileged for a today in which as consecrated persons we can express this most fundamental dimension of the Church's evangelizing commitment? Which issues should we deepen to give greater substance to our commitment for the poor and justice, and to better integrate it into the experience of our religious consecration? What can we learn from a more profound relationship with other persons and movements that fight for a more just and fairer world and what can we offer them? How can we live out the political dimension of Christian love while remaining faithful to the Gospel message and our vocation as consecrated persons?

4.4. Rethinking the Role of our Works

Establishing “where to be” and “how to be there” is a difficult discernment exercise. We cannot dismiss the matter by defining a number of strategic criteria to simply guarantee the continuity of the Institution, its growth in terms of

numbers or its geographic expansion. To come to this determination, we must first of all be aware of our own identity in a given context and have the freedom, wisdom and audacity to adjust our works and their activities to the emerging needs of those contexts. Our credibility is at stake.

The charism of consecrated life has a prophetic dimension. It is clearly stated by *Vita Consecrata* (cf. VC 84). This prophetism is expressed by faithfully living out one's consecration and generously giving oneself to the mission. In proposition 24 of the Synod on "The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church", reference is made to consecrated life; its missionary vocation and its being in the frontline are emphasized. It is stated that consecrated life has always been on the geographic, social and cultural frontiers of evangelization. This is something that our Institutes endorse with their missionary history and the creativity with which they have sought to respond to the challenges they have encountered.

What is our specific place in this moment of the world's history and of the Church? The charismatic heritage of each Institute has something important to say in this respect. We will have to allow ourselves to be questioned by the spiritual journey of the Founder of Foundress, which led them to express their commitment for the Kingdom of God in a specific way. We will have to carefully discern the permanent elements of the charism and its concrete expression in history and in the different geographic and cultural contexts that are part of the Institute's life. At the same time, however, a new reflection will be necessary on the life and mission of the Church and the different charisms and ministries as well as the different forms of Christian life which they generate. They are all gifts which the Spirit awakens so that life may grow and the mission of the Church may be fulfilled, consistent with god's plan. Deepening our reflection on the identity of consecrated life within the context of an ecclesiology of communion will help us to better define the traits that characterize the specific contribution of this charism to the ecclesial community on the whole. It will also foster attitudes of complementarity and reciprocity which allow for a harmonious growth of the whole Christian community.

To this end, we should carefully examine our place within the universal Church and in particular Churches. It may often be observed that, due to increasing lack of clergy, the originality of charisms is superseded by the need to keep up pastoral structures and carry out tasks that are not exactly the best expression of the gifts given by the Spirit to his Church through the Founders, Foundresses and the communities that developed around them. This is something that appears more evidently in the case of clerical Congregations. We should not refrain

from providing apostolic services necessary for faith to grow in the Christian community and for a more dynamic development of its mission. Rather, we should ask ourselves whether the place that we have come to occupy is due to a lack of the creativity that is needed to give new expressions to the charism of the Institute, and to thus let it continue to enrich the life of the Church and foster its mission in the world. We cannot ignore the calls for us to be present in the new *aeropagi* of the mission, so often repeated by Pope John Paul II.

We thus realize that there is a need for a reflection on the identity of consecrated life in the life of the Church as a whole and in the fulfilment of its mission. This cannot be achieved without a new theology of the world and of the mission. They are issues which we must carefully address, so as to give truly significant apostolic answers and discern the role we are to play within the life and mission of the Church.

What are the elements that we should stress in a theology which seeks to embrace the different charisms and ministries in the Church, as well as the ways of life which they encourage? Which attitudes should we adopt to be able to live out this communion and give it a truly missionary meaning? What would be the most appropriate places for consecrated life within the framework of ecclesial life and in its missionary projection? Where do we find the greatest difficulties when considering new roles?

4.5. Gaining Ground in Inter-congregational Collaboration and Shared Mission

Ours is a time of synergies. Globalization processes are imposing synergy in the different spheres of life and human activities. The complexity of situations and the complementarity of skills converts into a need whatever was just one of the many options until quite recently.

We have witnessed a considerable decline in the number of staff serving our Institutes in certain parts of the world. On the other hand, the globalization processes under way are posing new challenges to which it is difficult for individual Institutes to respond in a significant way. The time has come to undertake the path of inter-congregational collaboration with greater determination. In recent years, the joint reflection for a and the collaboration efforts between religious Institutes have produced abundant fruit. Now is the time to take a further step forward and enter a new phase of inter-congregational collaboration, in which we can plan evangelization initiatives that can give respond more significantly to the challenges of the contemporary world. Some experiences are already showing the great potential of this approach.

This will involve a reflection on the interaction of charisms and their concrete incarnation in the activities that have characterized the life of Institutes in the course of their history. It will probably require new organizational models at a community and government level. The prospect of a greater inter-congregational collaboration will force us to also introduce a certain number of elements in initial and ongoing formation processes to prepare people for this type of experience. We will have to foster communion between those who are involved in the same project and at the same time make sure that each one consolidates the identity of the religious family to which he or she has been called. These new challenges may enrich the spiritual heritage of each Institute and consecrated life in general. Of course, they will require that a new impulse be given to the missionary dimension of consecrated life. Great clarity will also be necessary in the creation of projects, with discernment processes that will be enriched by the sensitivity of each one of the Institutes involved.

This aspect goes hand in hand with the one mentioned previously in connection with “shared mission”. I will not repeat myself. I simply wish to make sure you realize how important all this is for the mission of the Church and of consecrated life. In this collaboration process, we will learn the language of inclusiveness, which will make us clearer and more comprehensible signs of the message which we were sent to deliver.

What does consecrated life need to undertake the path of inter-congregational collaboration with greater determination? How can it be a positive element in the missionary projection of the various Institutes and consecrated life in general? What would be the best ways to concretely foster this type of collaboration? Which projects could more easily encourage inter-congregational collaboration? What would this imply in the life of each Institute, and how could they respond to the challenges which this collaboration paradigm would inevitably pose? What steps should we take to see to it that the needs of the “shared mission” become a reality in the life of our Institutes?

CONCLUSION

To the disciples going back from Jerusalem to Emmaus Jesus asks, “What were you talking about along the way?” They have to recognize that the thoughts and sentiments they had shared did not leave much room for hope. Instead, they generated a sense of discouragement in their hearts and would have probably led them to abandon Jesus. Only after having reviewed reality, enlightened by the word of Jesus, were they able to discover the paschal dimension of the facts which they had witnessed and feel impregnated by the new life which these

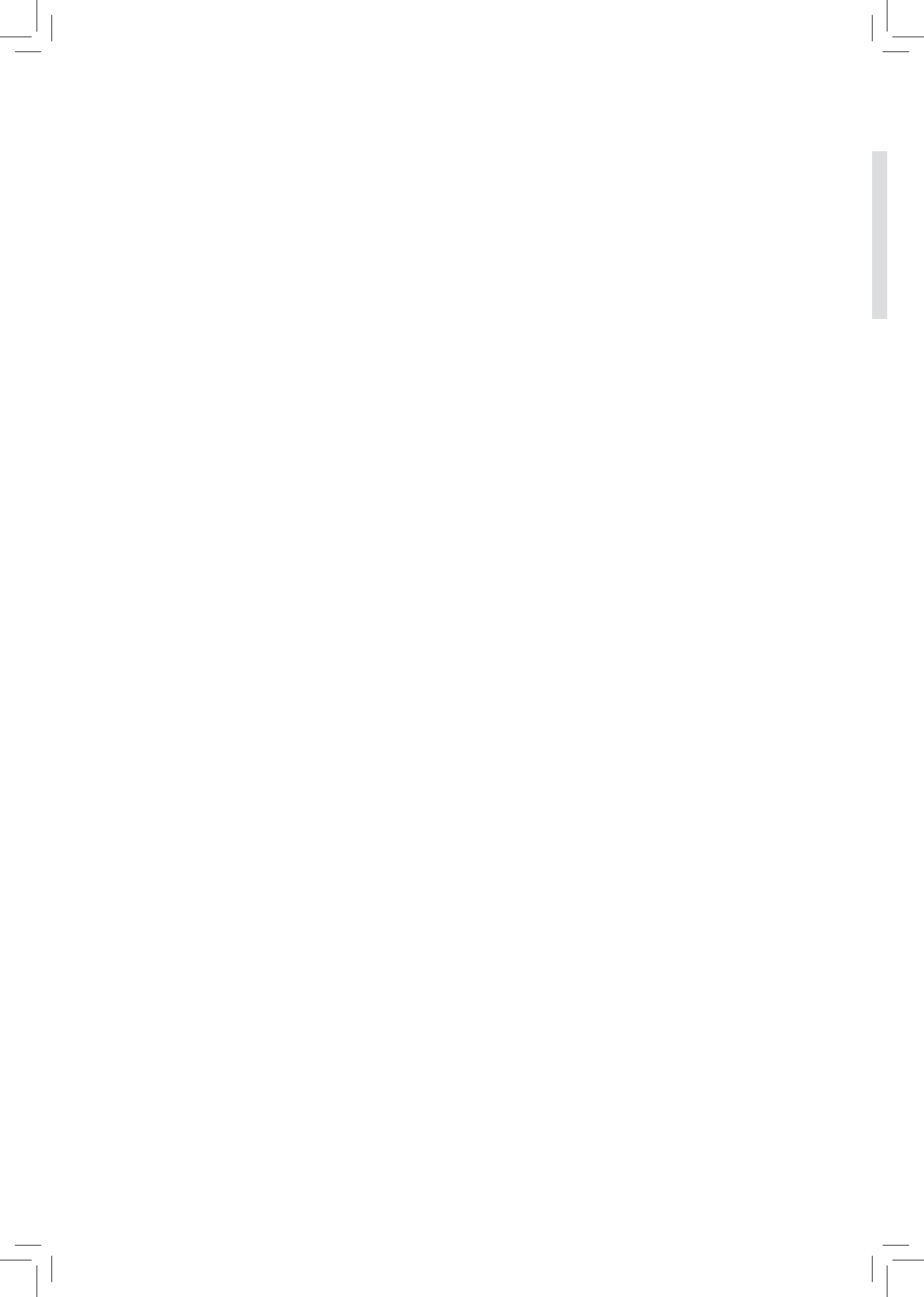
facts generated. Their missionary answer came right away, and they set off immediately. Jesus is asking us the same question today, what do you talk about in your Assemblies and meetings? Which thoughts and feelings fill your hearts? Why is it so difficult for you to look at reality in the light of my Word and interpret events through the lens of the paschal mystery?

We know that when the Word does not dwell within us, as in the case of the disciples of Emmaus, we enter into a state of de-mission. Only when we let the Lord unveil the Word to us, does our heart burn, does the Eucharist take on meaning and do we once again become part of the community gathered around Jesus, ready to carry out the mission that he himself entrusts us. Only through Jesus and his plan are we capable of discovering the signs of the times and discern how we ourselves can become signs of God's presence in our world, and signs of that alternative reality which we call the "Kingdom of God".

It is up to us to translate theological and pastoral insight into actions and projects. At the same time, we will realize that it is through a reflection on the concrete experience of consecrated persons that we shall find the keys to build the new language which we need for the theology of Consecrated Life. We urgently need to further integrate concrete experience with theological reflection and enlighten experience with theology. What we really wish is for our words and lives to be capable of powerfully expressing the passion for Christ and humankind which we feel within us.

Endnotes

1. This article is basically the address given by the author at the meeting of the Union of Superiors General (USG), Rome in 2010.
2. Cf. Misioneros Claretianos "*Hacer con otros*", *fundamentos de la misión compartida*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires, 2006, 20-21.



BOOK REVIEW

Diarmuid O’Murchu, Christianity’s Dangerous Memory: A Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Jesus.

Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012, pages 216.

Diarmuid O’Murchu, a priest of the Sacred Heart Missionary Order (MSC) and graduate of the Trinity College, Dublin, is a global best-selling author and social psychologist. As a couple’s counselor, bereavement worker and social worker with homeless people and refugees, he has led workshops, retreats, and adult faith and development programs around the world. A motivational speaker and writer, he challenges people on issues of Christian faith, spirituality and religious life. The book, **Christianity’s Dangerous Memory: A Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Jesus**, is intended, as the author acknowledges, for the adult faith-seekers and it is indeed a feast for them. The readers are led into the adventurous terrain of the Revolutionary Jesus, quite unlike the projected docile and spiritualized Jesus of the Church. With good and relevant examples and arguments, the author powerfully presents the truth of his understanding and faith in the style of deconstruction, reconstruction and remembrance embellished with the fine art of poetry. The text is also supplemented with detailed notes and good bibliography.

The book is divided into ten chapters, excluding the introduction and the epilogue. In the first chapter, the author explains the demonic possession at the time of Jesus as the internalized oppression in people due to the patriarchal power-wielding in society. Jesus worked to rid his society of this oppression and his true disciples are called to take a countercultural stance of denunciation and renunciation of all dehumanizing power in society so that people may embrace the fullness of God-given humanity. The second chapter clarifies the Aramaic term for ‘Kingdom of God’ to accurately mean ‘Companionship of Empowerment,’ in which Jesus is the primordial disciple. It urges the earthly and personal transformation through justice, equality and empowerment without violence. The third chapter attacks the Aristotelian concept of an individualistic

human personhood while emphasizing the relational identity of humanity. Quoting Walter Wink, the author underscores the goal of human life as to become truly human. Chapter four expounds the subversive elements in the parables of Jesus such as radical inclusiveness, hiddenness and extravagance. It calls for empowered persons in an empowered creation. De-spiritualizing the miracle stories of the Gerasene demoniac, Jairus' daughter and the woman with hemorrhage, Chapter five presents an excellent interpretation of the Christian mission in a dehumanizing world of tradition and rituals. It exhorts the reclamation of intuition and imagination as inner healers of human persons in such a way that vulnerability is engaged and transformed rather than suppressed or denied. The table fellowship of Jesus as radical inclusiveness for mutual empowerment is dealt with in Chapter six. None is excluded but are rather called to collaborate in empowering justice for the common good. Chapter seven reveals that not only women but men too were marginalized and severely handicapped during the time of Jesus and hence the need arises for total empowerment through the integration of biological differences rather than their elimination. Chapter eight critiques the traditional concept of Christ's salvific suffering on the cross and makes an urgent call to move away from the dysfunctional devotion of consolation to the functional spirituality of liberation. The author is of the view that salvation is wholeness encompassing the entire web of life including the suffering experienced during the process of empowerment. Chapter nine presents Jesus as an archetype embodying human potentials, including weaknesses and mistakes. Hence the author contends that the work of empowerment is through vulnerability, weakness, mistakes and sinfulness, prompting us to embrace our fragile humanness and not to discredit them. Chapter ten questions the feasibility of an empowering church devoid of the trappings of the past and following the Companionship of Empowerment while elucidating the various characteristics this possibility demands. The author concludes with the poetic unmasking of patriarchal power-games and makes a call for the true reawakening of mind and spirit.

The author has made a good and praiseworthy attempt to demolish the grandiose baggage of the past Christianity and to uncover the Gospel and its message in its radicality for the present times, with new and bold interpretations of the gospel passages. The candid presentation of the humanness of Jesus and its implication in our lives too is very encouraging and noteworthy. However, a tendency could be seen to demote Jesus to just a human person against the fully-human-fully-divine person that Church upholds and this is rather non-palatable for the Christians and the Church which stands on the foundation of this faith. Other questions too arise: Can we assign the supposedly simple, illiterate and

ordinary disciples of Jesus with the lofty goal of magnifying the person and works of Jesus, especially in the years close to his earthly life and mission? Is there a rationale in denouncing the gospels for its high-flown presentation of Jesus while simultaneously bringing out the subversiveness in Jesus' life and works from the very texts? Apart from these pertinent questions, the book is indeed a good-read and a strong aid to critically understand Jesus, our faith and our Christian mission today.

Sr. Joseline Mary, SJC

Andrea Tornielli, Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope of a New World

California: Ignatius press, 2013, pages 175.

Francis: Pope of a New World is a book on the new Pope released just two weeks after his election. The author is a well-known Vaticanist Andrea Tornielli, who not only had interviewed Cardinal Bergoglio in the past but also shared a light friendship with him. This is an advantage that helped him to put together a comprehensive picture of this new Pope from the end of the world.

When the name of the new Pope was announced from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, it came as a surprise to many. Despite the fact that the name Bergoglio was a probable candidate at 2005 conclave, he was mainly unknown to many of us. As the world gradually comes to know him mostly through his homilies and news reports, many hunger for more. Where did he come from? Who is this man, now the Bishop of Rome and the leader of the Catholic Church?

The author is the first biographer to answer most of these questions about the new Pope. This book cannot be considered an extensive biography, but it is a solid introduction to Pope Francis. The author mainly relies on past interviews, previously published articles and his first-hand experience of the Vatican as a writer of the Vatican Insider website. He seems to be a good storyteller who uses even superfluous details to bring out a good story.

This biography is a good starting point for both committed Catholics and curious readers. The first three chapters speak of Pope Benedict's resignation, the conclave and the election of new Pope. These details are already familiar to any person who had been a keen observer of the events surrounding Vatican. He also gives a historical overview of Popes who have resigned and especially who had considered resigning. He also mentions some of the scandals in recent years such as so called "Vatican leaks" and Cardinal O'Brien's resignation. Also mentioned were Cardinal Mahony and the efforts to cover up various issues and

the pressure for him not to attend the conclave. However the author's familiarity with the Vatican and many journalistic sources add a level of depth and sets the background to this short biography.

From the very onset Tornielli manifests a clear perception of Pope Francis and the nature of his Pontificate. With regard to the reaction of the public at the time announcement of name, Bergoglio writes: "In him they recognize one of themselves, someone who came to serve and not to lord it over them, a man who came to share, not merely to exercise a sacred authority." In his narrative way he says that Pope Francis wants a peaceful Church for the poor and of the poor.

As the story unfolds, the author portrays a picture of Pope Francis with his humble origins. He was from a family that is neither rich nor poor. "We were poor with dignity", Tornielli quotes the words of Pope's sister. As a youngster he loved football and tango. At the beginning of his secondary school he began to work in a socks factory during vacation. The author draws these stories of Pope's early life from interviews with family members as well as a previously released Spanish biography of then-*Cardinal Bergoglio, El Jesuita*.

In the rest of the chapters we find the story of his vocation and his life in the Society of Jesus emphasizing on obedience, discipleship and missionary work. The author also highlights him as a Bishop and Cardinal who values mercy and his ability to see each person as an encounter with Christ. With the help of various incidents and anecdotes, Tornielli brings out Bergoglio's desire to bring the love of God to the people entrusted to his care. By the end of the biography, the reader finds himself in the present day after Pope Francis has been installed as the new bishop of Rome. In short, this is a short biography on the man who was a surprise choice, even a kind of revolutionary choice, for Pope. It is the story of the humble pastor of one of the world's largest archdioceses; a Cardinal who takes the bus, talks with common folk, and lives simply. The world is yet to discover the changes he intends to bring in and this book opens a door to the life of a Pope whom the world looks up to with great expectations.

Fr. Richard N. Jude John, OSB

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