

*THE NEW FRONTIERS
OF CONSECRATED LIFE*

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PREFACE

Rosalia Armillotta

Original in Italian

For some years now, Consecrated Life lives in a phase of transition, of transformation. Attempts at reorganization of structures are multiplying. New forms of apostolate are in view. But still today, this phenomenon, ever old but ever new, lives in the “here and not yet”, in that “twilight” which always precedes great epochal changes .

“*Crossing the frontiers in company of Jesus of Nazareth*” is the proposal of **Fr. Toni Catalá, SJ**, who takes up the more recurring expressions and topics in the apostolic fields of the Company of Jesus at the conclusion of their 35^a General Congregation and retraces the evangelical account of Luke strongly inviting the Consecrated Life to cross the frontiers of prejudice (Lk 7, 36 – 50); to come closer, without fear, to a fragmented and humiliated humanity (Lk 8, 26 – 39); to accept the invitation to the banquet of “fraternal differences” (Lk 15, 11-32); to share up to the end the human condition (Lk 22, 54 – 62) and to reconcile all divisions (Lk 23, 45). Thus, “... *there is nothing left for us than ask the Compassionate One to immerse us in the world so that together with Him we may proclaim the Good News of God, Source of all Life and with Him we may give birth to dignity, justice and fraternity.*”

Along the same line, **John Dunne** draws from his own experience as a clinical psychologist to show the strong “*interconnection between seeking God, coming to know one’s true self and learning one’s relationship with the world*”. In a continuous reference to the great mystics of Christian history, above all, Thomas Merton, John Dunne underlines “reconciliation of the opposites” at the root of every correct social behavior: the reconciliation between active life and contemplative life, between interiority and exteriority, between our lights and our shadows, between the cloister and the world, etc.

“*That theme of reconciliation of what are sometimes only apparent opposites that is at the heart of bringing about INNER justice and peace, has a much wider application than purely personal and individual. It is at the heart of all external human endeavor; it is at the heart of building a just and peaceful society; and it is at the heart of the Christian gospel. It is also a theme that finds expression in contemporary religious life.*”

Sr Deirdre Mullan, RSM, in her article “*Prophetic Voices as a Leaven for Good in a Hurting World*” points out in particular, the social dimension of

Consecrated Life. Being the International representative at the United Nations in New York of the great family of the Sisters of Mercy, Sr. Deirde had the chance to *“to travel and see firsthand what is happening in many parts of our world”*.

The Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals on the one hand and the Social Teaching of the Church, on the other, try to give a systemic response to the many different situations of poverty which are becoming ever more dramatic and degrading for human dignity. Consecrated Life is called to play a key role in the action of awareness raising and mobilization of political Institutions and of International Organizations such that, as Ban Ki Moon Secretary General of the United Nations said: *“...**People of faith** are on the front lines of efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest and bridge chasms of ignorance and misunderstanding. Religious groups can also be powerful advocates in mobilizing political leaders and the public at large...”*

In reading the contemporary society, a note on the new technologies of communication cannot be lacking. In *“The digital era: an opportunity for Consecrated Life”*, **Fr. Fernando Prado, CMF** puts us in front of this “new culture” introduced by the digital technologies. Internet, the Web, the Social Networks reveal themselves to us as space and opportunity for evangelization, fully aware of the risks and limitations which these means entail. The new generations of the digital age impose on us a series of reflection on the initial and permanent formation of Consecrated Life, to live evangelically and responsibly the challenge of global communication and be present in the “net” as “cybernauts of the Gospel”.

The article of **Judith King**, *“Reflections on Consecrated Life in Europe”* closes this edition of the Bulletin, presenting for our consideration a point by point description of the post-modern society in Europe wherein Consecrated Life is called to react to all forms of improvisation, of insecurity and to open oneself to new perspectives of evangelization, revealing the enormous potentials still enclosed within notwithstanding the decrease in numbers and advancement in age. The biblical icon of this renaissance is the incredulity of Nicodemus in front of the incomprehensible wisdom of Jesus: *“how can a grown man return to the womb of his mother to be born again?”*

We would like to conclude then with these same words of Sr. Judith:

“For, I believe, we are being deeply challenged as disciples to be prophetic, to both openly acknowledge and mourn the passing of the old whilst simultaneously becoming involved in birthing the new.”

CROSSING THE FRONTIERS IN COMPANY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Fr. Toni Catalá, SJ

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Conference delivered at the headquarters of UISG in Rome on March 11,
2010

Original in Spanish

It's been a year since the conclusion of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus and the terms "on the frontiers" and "building bridges" have begun to circulate in the apostolic fields of the Company. The origin of these expressions can be found in the homily of the Superior General of the Company at the Thanksgiving Mass, as well as in Benedict XVI's address to the Congregation:

"The Church urgently needs people of strong and deep faith, serious culture and a genuine human and social sensitivity, of religious priests who devote their lives to stay in these frontiers to witness and help others understand that there is a profound harmony between faith and reason, between evangelical spirit, thirst for justice and work for peace."

Frontiers are mostly little defined areas, which we consider as geographic boundaries, (Dictionary of the RAE) where one usually needs a passport to pass through, otherwise there are risks to face. Leaving one's own territory always provokes a certain fear of the unknown and no matter how many maps we possess, frontiers, being places not yet traveled, give one a sense of insecurity. When we are invited to go and explore frontiers, we are supposed to have a certain ability to take risks. In the area of faith in the Lord Jesus and in His good news, we have identified two frontiers: the field of human knowledge and the field of injustice and exclusion. These are frontiers which are not geographic, cultural, social, religious, economic...they are present in all the dimensions of our apostolic life.

"Today, I think we can consider them the "nations". In fact we

know all the geographic nations, but perhaps other nations exist, not geographical, but human communities that ask for our assistance: the poor, the marginalized, the excluded. In this globalized world the number of those who are excluded from everything increases. This is because society only accepts the great, not the small ones. All those who are disadvantaged, manipulated are for us the “nations”: nations that need a prophet of the message of God” (Fr. Adolfo Nicolas in the Thanksgiving Eucharist).

The invitation to the frontier is always a call to go towards what is unknown, to overcome laziness and routines, to be allowed to question what is perceived as a threat, to listen to fears that can paralyze us. It is an invitation to make mistakes and to correct them. It is an exercise of freedom and of courage, it is to bring the Good News of Jesus for real. It is the willingness go through the evangelical story with Jesus that it may illuminate the Consecrated Life.

a) “Simon, I have something to say to you...”

“if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of a woman this is who is touching him...Simon, I have something to say to you”... Lk 7, 36-50

Jesus is in the house of Simon, the Pharisee and here comes “the sinner of the city”. Two glances, two different perceptions of a reality affronting them: the Pharisee, with his incapacity to perceive in the woman - injured in her dignity - a creature of the God of life, expresses contempt and exclusion. Simon is incapable of crossing the frontier that defines good and bad behavior, he is incapable, is blinded, is blocked in his belief in God by his own self-assurance, to perceive that which is human in its heart wrenching dimension: this creature humiliated, rejected, downtrodden, disoriented, “sinful”. Jesus crosses the frontier, perceives a woman who needs to be restored but at the same time capable of expressing something as human as gratitude and the search for physical touch; bows down, “kisses the feet of Jesus”, hangs on to a thread of life as possibility of salvation. Jesus comes up with a gesture of relief, of pardon, of renewal, of healing.

“Consecrated life, has something to say to you” : How do you perceive the creatures of this crazy world which is so unjust, lacerated, unhinged? Are you capable of perceiving the call of creatures behind so many unusual behaviors or do you hold on to your own verdict and contempt? We are faced with many ethical, moral challenges... what

is human is very much threatened, there are frontiers which are very inconvenient in the areas of bio-ethics, of ethical and moral behavior. We are asked to take care of human beings, and in this frontier compassion cannot be lacking. It means to perceive the pain of so many creatures who are stigmatized because they feel judged, despised by those whom they believe to possess the science of good and evil. What we need is the wisdom of discernment, of professional competence, not so much a sense of complacency. Above all, we need the assurance that mercy will not be wanting.

b) “What do you want from me, Jesus?”

“What do you want from me, Jesus, Son of God the Most High?”
Lk 8,26-39

Jesus goes to the other side of the lake, enters the land of the Gerasenes, enters a world that is not His by origin, enters a territory where a legion of demons is found: the sub-human. At this time Jesus crosses an authentic frontier. Jesus is with a man who is injured, who does not speak but shouts, who is despoiled of clothing in stark nakedness, living in a place of death, among the dead. People keep him in chains to set him to his death ... Jesus enters in the shadows of this setting, He enters in chaos and disorder, He passes on to the “another side”.

This reality confronts Jesus and questions Him “what do you want from me?...” Keeping up with this reality is arduous and difficult, because here, Jesus encounters many demons. Jesus always enters reality guided by the Spirit of Life. Jesus became flesh in this world but this world has its many concrete hell. Jesus, the Son of the living God, did not come into this world to stay in welcoming places which are socially recognized, pleasant and well known, but rather He enters places which are thresholds of hell. There are frontiers which make one lose a sense of security because “the other side” questions us by what virtue or of whose authority do we commit ourselves in this world so much dominated by oppressive powers which today, are very subtle.

Consecrated Life cannot fall into the trap of falling back and remaining only in familiar territories, but “must be guided by the Spirit” on the “other side”. It is necessary to perceive “the other side” in different contexts but it will always be part of refugee camps, along the margins, settlements, places where threats to humanity continue. We do not always question the “why” or for “whom” we venture into the territories of the poor and the excluded. Many of us have never

been to those places, we have always avoided them; today, with purified intentions, it is not a matter of going to these places as an escape from something but it is rather to discover that these territories are the favorite dwelling place of the Father.

There are hidden and irrelevant frontiers, boundaries that are not found in maps and are hidden in anonymity. They lead to some dark corners where the dignity of millions of creatures are at play. Let us not lose the capacity to be led by the Spirit in order to continue the work of Jesus, of liberation and healing. After Jesus confronted the demons of Gerasenes, the possessed man now appears “seated, fully clothed and sane”; this man has recovered his dignity as a creature. The difficult encounter generated life. Jesus was asked to leave because He has destabilized the environment, the world order that wants the Gerasenes chained in an excluded territory. Jesus gives us the power to create – like Him and with Him – processes in which the excluded ones of humanity may be relocated to places of life and not of death.

In many contexts, Consecrated Life runs the risk of not realizing, in their lifestyle and abode, the invitation and the encouraging words of Benedict XVI: “I encourage you to continue and renew your mission among the poor and with the poor.” (Audience at the 35th General Congregation) “Among the poor and with the poor” will require from us a new change of sensitivity, to learn from the mistakes and the successes in recent years in order to bring Consecrated Life along the margins of society.

This continues to be of interest to all Congregations especially as regards the admission of candidates, the purification of the motivation of the sequela Christi, the location of the houses of formation and, above all, the passion for the Lord of Life and for His most threatened creatures.

c) “The elder son became angry and refused to come in ...”

“Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. The Pharisees and the Scribes were grumbling and saying, «this fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them» ...the elder son became angry and refused to come in...” Lk 15, 1-2, 11-32

Jesus eats with sinners and unbelievers. In the culture of Jesus, sharing the table expresses that sinners and unbelievers belong to the family of God. A shared meal is a sign of the Kingdom. Jesus again, crosses a dangerous frontier: a meal open to all. In the banquet of the

Kingdom, Jesus lives together with those who are despised by the doctors of the law, for whom God has become a private property. Jesus does not exclude but includes, Jesus does not refuse but accepts, Jesus does not separate but unites, Jesus does not condemn but forgives. Today, churches and religions are prone to draw lines of well defined separation, they do not give the impression of being sacraments of salvation for all and places that anticipate fraternity and justice. Frontiers are increasingly being controlled where guards are ever ready to eliminate any area of interchange of shared meals with every man and woman of goodwill.

Jesus painfully experienced that the “elder children” do not want to sit at a shared meal nor at the table of brotherhood. The Father goes out to seek them that they may enter into the welcome feast of the “younger children” who come back only as a matter of survival but discovered that the Father welcomes them as children, but the elder sons do not want to come in. This not wanting to come in is the hardest part of the parable, the most painful part that Jesus experiences in front of His offer of brotherhood.

Despite the resentments and resistance which Apostolic Life may encounter, it must dissolve the frontiers that exclude the dynamics of shared meal, educative spaces both formal and informal in which one experiences the disappearance of lines dividing ethnicity, gender, origin, the dividing lines created by differences in cultural and religious sensitivities, areas open for education to citizenship, citizens open to life and the recognition of the “other”, of differences. Those who are far are not so distant from us after all. There is no need to go a long way to meet them. They are in our schools, universities, they are our neighbors at home and in parishes. How come we do not know what to do in spite of the fact that they are so close? We continue to be content with what is “ours” while the “others” are close and are becoming even closer. We have to be creative in order to seat at the same table aware that the resistance and reluctance come from both sides, but we have to build bridges. Considering those who are far, do they understand our language? Do we understand theirs?

We must be particularly sensitive that our formulated contents correspond to our effective actions. We might have the most correct articulations which could be very evangelical, but we would have to move out or move on in order to make real what we proclaim. For example, we cannot preach “homilies” on Jesus’ preference for the little ones and at the same time say: “Madam, please bring that child

out of the Church because it disturbs me”. Jesus speaks out and acts on His words. Jesus proclaims the Good News of God the Father to all and seats down to eat with everyone. Jesus proclaims God’s mercy and invites everyone. These convictions are possible only when we anchor our lives on God the Father and Creator who reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ. We cannot build bridges if we are not deeply convinced that it is worth the effort to make both sides meet.

We must be ready to sit at the shared table and not consider it as a threat: the fear of losing one’s identity is crippling. When one fears for one’s identity in the Consecrated life, we deny the possibility of sharing our meals with others. A lot of discourses have been made on this. It is obvious that our identity is given to us by our loving attachment to “our vocation in the Institute which is our step towards Him”. The insistence on one’s identity in fact makes us close ourselves to other realities when it should not be closed but rather open in order to enkindle other fires.

d) “Woman, I do not know Him”

“This man also was with him. But he denied it saying: woman, I do not know him!” Lk 22, 54-62

Peter does not want to completely cross the frontier to get closer to Jesus who gave Himself up to the end: he denies everything that he had so far lived with Him. Peter and the disciples did not want to overcome certain limits in the following of Jesus. They want to follow Jesus without giving up their lives. When they realized that there are no first places, when they saw that the first in the kingdom are the least in the world, when they perceived that Jesus does not withdraw from the city that kills its prophets, they decided it is better to deny Jesus than risk their own lives to the end.

“Spirituality” in our culture, has become a dangerous word that hides a lot of things and I think that what it hides and blocks most of all is the resistance to interiorly know “Christ delivered unto death”. Jesus, in His passion, crosses the frontier of passivity and delimitations; Jesus preferred to give up His life rather than cause suffering, violence and death in the name of God, Source of Life for whom He has lived His whole existence. Jesus knows that the only rights to be defended are those of the holy innocents, the victims, the poor, the excluded, the rejected, the oppressed and the tortured, not the rights of the “I”. There exists spirituality not willing to waive the rights of the “I”, to renounce

to the well being of the “I” for others, to renounce to the comforts of the “I” in order to fight so that the others might have a better accommodation in life...There exists spirituality that does not want to cross the frontiers of oneself. But if this frontier is not crossed, it would be impossible to take notice of other frontiers.

Not knowing the suffering face of Christ means not wanting to know the God of Communitarian Love compassionately involved with His creatures. It means not knowing the Most Blessed Trinity. This knowledge is a knowledge of limits. Peter disowned Him and His disciples abandoned Him because they find it unbearable that the human condition in its truth and nakedness is revealed in Jesus. Only when they perceived that the Risen One gives them the Peace of unconditional Love are they able to rebuild their lives of sequela in deep humility in the acceptance of their own weakness and failure.

Suffering abrogates the frontiers of one’s love, desire and interest. It dissolves the frontier of the “I” which is self-confident, impassive and allows one to enter the compassionate community with the suffering and the vulnerability of human condition. It is not possible to understand love without suffering for persons who love. Jesus crossed all the frontiers until death on the cross in order to be one with us. “Oh love who came in my poverty, how well you speak my own language, oh my suffering friend, how well do I understand you! Oh sweet folly of mercy which became flesh and blood”(Hymn, Lauds on Friday Week II). Jesus has crossed all frontiers, assumed our weakness by destroying the cultural myths of success, competence, image, comfort, apathy passivity... to show with His own life that he who loses life, gains it.

With no offense to anyone, we must say that a spirituality that does not cross the frontier and the limits of what each culture tells us today about the human condition, is not Christian. The world has set very clear frontiers and limits to the “I”: be a winner, do not show weakness, look for success, do not get involved, take care of your well being, care for yourself at all cost... it is an “I” designed and built to be a source of profit for every type of endeavor that has something to do with humanity. Jesus who stands on “the other side” of the limits set by the world, shows us that grace is found at the very end. This steep frontier can only be overcome with the force coming from the Holy Spirit.

Consecrated Life must discern deeply what it means when it says “spirituality”. This is one of the areas most difficult to discern because

the world is astute and “spirituality” today has become a profitable commodity in the market. Let us not fall into the trap of saying, like Simon, “I do not know Him...”. If we do not recognize Him, we cannot build bridges nor cross the frontiers that will lead us beyond our personal or institutional interests: Let us come out of our “I” to open ourselves to life. This is the way of the Paschal mystery of Jesus.

e) “The veil of the temple was torn in two”

“The veil of the temple was torn in two” Lk 23,45

With the death of Jesus, the limit breaks, the frontier opens “once and for all”, there is no more line dividing the “Holy of Holies” and the secular world. He has dissolved the frontier that separates the space and the territory between the sacred and the profane. Now, there is only one world, the world of the compassionate God involved with the Crucified One. Now there are no more privileged places for the Divine Presence; He is on the Cross and in the crucified ones. Here, a new map is laid out, different from that traced out by world leaders and institutional religions that tend to define and control territories.

“Our home is the world”, P. Nadal said, our home is not found in sacred spaces. The veils of separation have been torn apart but let us not forget that the ever present temptation of religious is that of mending the tents which have been torn apart in order to have areas of power and religious territories to manage. It is the Centurion who is a stranger who perceives the divine presence in the Crucifix; He was not recognized by the religious leaders who swore before the Cross asking the Crucified One to prove that He was the Son of God by coming down from it. The Son of God does not come down from the Cross because He indeed is the All Compassionate.

This perception of the Cross makes us realize that in reality, frontiers are not religious, nor geographic, nor of the state or of any other entity and that we would have to look at the world from other parameters, from other categories. Then we sense that there is nothing left for us to do than ask the Compassionate One to immerse us in the world so that together with Him we may proclaim the Good News of God, Source of all Life and with Him we can bring forth dignity, justice and fraternity.

“Being on the frontiers” for St. Ignatius means asking for the grace to abandon one’s love, desire and interest so that only the Lord Jesus may truly be the Lord of our life. Consecrated Life, if it is faithful to

the roots of its life in poverty, chastity and obedience will continue with its journey together with the best of all those who have gone before us, on the streets of this world where the only frontier to be overcome is that which separates the human from the inhuman, justice from injustice, love from hate.

Vidimus Dominum new website:

www.vidimusdominum.org

We are very happy to inform you that November 1st we saw the launching of the completely redesigned website for *Vidimus Dominum*.

The new site is more attractive and agile, and it has the merit of containing links to the websites of your own Institutes.

“THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CONTEMPLATION AND A LIFE OF
JUSTICE, PEACE, AND CONCERN FOR
CREATION”

John Dunne

John Dunne is a retired Scottish Consultant Clinical Psychologist who worked in the Scottish National Health Service for more than 30 years while simultaneously holding honorary senior academic posts in the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews, Glasgow, and Stirling.

He also studied philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and St Peter's College in Glasgow, and was ordained a priest in 1967. He is no longer in the active ministry having sought and been granted formal dispensation, and remains in good standing with the Church. He has a particular interest in the relationship between psychology and spirituality and lectures widely on the topic.

This is an adaptation of a presentation given to Regional Gatherings of the Society of the Sacred Heart Scottish and Irish provinces in Dublin, Ireland, and Kilgraston and Edinburgh, Scotland, in March 2010

Original in English

In this short article I would like to offer some reflections on the relationship between a life of prayer and contemplation, on the one hand, and, on the other, a life committed to justice and peace and concern for all creation.

As a clinical psychologist with an interest in the relationship between psychology and spirituality, one of the things I often find myself helping people to do is to resolve conflicts within their own personality; to reconcile all sorts of apparent opposites within themselves. And of course that is a psychological and spiritual task and indeed a challenge we all have to face: reconciling our inner with our outer, our light with our darkness, our capacity for good with our capacity for the not-so-good, our real self with our ideal self, our past with our present. In a sense we could say that the aim of that lifelong challenge is to bring an inner peace and reconciliation that is also a way of doing

justice to the truth of ourselves. So it is a process by which we seek inner truth, reconciliation, peace and justice.

The great Swiss psychologist Carl Jung has taught us that the wholeness of the self – which he sees as being as much a spiritual as a psychological goal – is only achieved by this kind of inner self-awareness, self-acceptance, and reconciliation, and that it is primarily a process of transformation of all the disparate parts of ourselves into an integrated wholeness.

That theme of reconciliation of what are sometimes only apparent opposites that is at the heart of bringing about INNER justice and peace, has a much wider application than the purely personal and individual. It is at the heart of all external human endeavour; it is at the heart of building a just and peaceful society; and it is at the heart of the Christian gospel. It is also a theme that finds expression in contemporary religious life.

One of the many challenges facing religious life today, and indeed one of the tensions experienced within religious life itself as well between those seeking to live such a life and those who may wish to regulate it, is how we reconcile, for example, the contemplative with the active (the Mary with the Martha), the individual and personal with the social and community, the body with the soul, the “world” with the cloister, concern for the creation that is all around us with the building of the “kingdom within”, even reconciling life in this world with a life that is supposed to be focused on the next. And it seems to me that the questions that must be addressed are: are these real or only apparent “opposites” ? Can they be reconciled? Can they be integrated into a whole that reflects a truly contemporary approach to religious life?

I hope that in some small way some of what I say may provide a framework within which we can consider some of those questions.

A Carmelite friend of mine once said “*All contemplation is contemporary*”. Of course there is also perhaps a deeper sense in which contemplation, our relationship with the divine, is timeless rather than contemporary, in that it reflects what is eternal and beyond time, but in a very real sense, our inner personal here and now relationship with God is our relationship with the eternal God who is forever here and forever now. So in that sense contemplation is by definition “contemporary”.

Contemplation can also be said to be contemporary in the sense that the context in which mystics and contemplatives have experienced

and expressed their relationship with the divine is a very particular historically bound context, whether we're talking about Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, or Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen, or Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day.

So how can our relationship with God in prayer be contemporary in both those senses – a relationship that is in my here and now and yet also reflects God's eternal now? A relationship, in other words, that is beyond time and place but lives and moves and has its being in this time and in this place; a relationship that somehow reconciles the eternal with here and the now.

Under the heading 'Contemplation' in the 2008 General Chapter of the Religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart, we find the words:

*"Today, as women rooted in the heart of Christ, we reaffirm our heritage of contemplation that springs from a 'compelling love written in our hearts by the Spirit' ."*¹

and

*"When we contemplate the heart of Christ we enter into the movement of the Spirit who develops in us a listening heart, bringing us closer to God's reality, with the desire to promote justice, peace and the care of creation"*²

I will return to those particularly beautiful phrases: "*a compelling love written in our hearts by the Spirit*" and "*..the movement of the Spirit who develops in us a listening heart, bringing us closer to God's reality*" below, but first I would like to say a little about contemplation.

As we know, one of the great spiritual writers of the twentieth century was Thomas Merton. Perhaps the greatest gift Merton left to the whole Christian community was his writing on contemplative spirituality. Of course he did not invent contemplative spirituality, but he did make it accessible to many thousands of people through his writings. And the major theme that emerges in all his writings is that contemplation is not primarily about prayer in the usual sense, or about methods of praying; it's not one compartment of life, but it is meant to embrace each and every aspect of our life and our relationships: our relationship with God, with each other, and with the whole created universe.

For Thomas Merton – as for every other contemplative before him - the first thing to say about contemplation is that it is above all a gift from God, and it is about seeing God, and self, and the whole of

creation at a different and deeper level of reality. As William Shannon³ notes, contemplation is more than simply the exercise of prayer; he indicates that for Merton it involves the interconnected experience of three things, **SEEKING GOD, COMING TO KNOW ONE'S TRUE SELF, and LEARNING ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD**

SEEKING GOD

When Merton speaks of seeking God, he describes it as a seeking that is quite unlike any other we undertake in life. The most profound thing is that it is not seeking for something that is not already present.

Merton was once asked: "*What's the best way to help people attain union with God?*" and his answer was:

*"We must tell them above all that they are already united with God. Contemplative prayer is the coming into consciousness of what is already there."*⁴

Contemplation, then, is an awareness of what is already there and what is already there is our oneness with God at the deepest level of our being.

And when talking about the experience of seeking God, Merton frequently asks us to reflect on what kind of God we are seeking. The road to contemplation of God is "*strewn with fallen idols, false images that we've created for ourselves*"⁵. All these idols have to go, even all the holy images we have in our minds. Merton talks about:

*"a purification of the sanctuary, so that no graven thing may occupy a space that God has commanded to be left empty."*⁶

In other words, having let go of all the things that substitute for God, the contemplative is able to experience God, not in created words and images but "*in the silence of the very Divine selfhood.*" In contemplation, "*we don't bring God down to our level, rather God raises us to the divine level.*"⁷

COMING TO KNOW OUR TRUE SELF

For Merton the experience in contemplation of the reality of God makes it possible to, as he says, "*awaken to the reality of self*".... "*to awaken to the Real within all that is real.*" And the only thing that is real is that "*something of God*" that is in everything created. That is why he describes contemplation not only as seeking God, but discovering

my true self in God.

He teaches us that:

“In contemplation, as we let go of all words and concepts as a way of relating to God, we enter God’s own silence in the depths of our being, and there we discover in God a relationship so direct that we discover our own true selves in God.”⁸

LEARNING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD

When we find God in contemplation, we also find the rest of reality, especially our fellow human beings. Merton’s idea is that we discover them, in Shannon’s words, *“not as a faceless mass but as individual persons, each distinct and unique in the eyes of God, yet in some way not separate from God or even from one another. God is the Hidden Ground of Love for all human beings, and when we become aware of our own total dependence on Him and the dependence of all reality on Him, we experience a sense of interdependence with all God’s people and also the sense of responsibility we have towards them.”⁹*

So, for Merton true contemplation increases our sense of social justice and concern, as well as increasing our ecological concern for all the good things of creation that God has given us.

For Thomas Merton, the outcome of true contemplation, true union with God in prayer, was, above all, compassion – compassion for every single unique human being.

Most of us are familiar with the experience in Merton’s life that was often referred to as “The Louisville Miracle” or “The Fourth and Walnut” experience. The following is his own account of this experience:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the realisation that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness.....

.....This sense of liberation came as a relief and a joy. Thank God, thank God, that I am like other men...a member of the human race...a race in which God Himself has become incarnate. If only everyone could realise this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking round shining like the sun.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes.....At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness that is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God.....this point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us.....It is in everybody, and if we could see we could see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and the cruelty of life vanish completely.”¹⁰

What had initially been a journey away from the world – the “*fuga mundi*” – had come full circle. Instead of the traditional “leaving of the world” and the traditional “contempt for the world” with all its snares and temptations (the famous “*contemptus mundi*” of the monastic life), he began to embark on a spiritual journey *towards* the world and its beauty and towards all mankind in a spirit above all of compassion. And, as we know, he began to engage with the major world issues of the day, in particular with racism, violence and non-violence, peace and war.

He saw, in other words, that the true fruit of contemplation was, as our topic has it, a “*life of justice and peace and concern for all creation.*”

I have referred already to reconciliation of opposites, or at least apparent opposites. This profound insight of Merton into the relationship between the contemplative life and a life of justice and peace and concern for all creation, represents for me a real reconciliation between the active and the contemplative life. And not just a reconciliation, but a true integration into wholeness of those two movements – the movement inwards towards a deep awareness of the presence of God and a movement outwards to His creation.

This is all beautifully echoed in the RSCJ General Chapter document I referred to earlier. It puts it like this:

When we contemplate the Heart of Christ we enter into the movement of the Spirit who develops in us a listening heart, bringing us closer to God's reality, with the desire to promote justice, peace and the care of creation.”

And the fact that that Chapter document centres this on the Heart of Christ and the movement of the Spirit emboldens me now to try to

place some of this in a theological context. In more specific terms what I propose to do is to set this whole integration of the contemplative life and a life of justice and peace and concern for all creation firmly within the theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation, because I believe that it is really only within that context that the deeper significance of this reconciliation and integration can be understood.

As a preliminary to that focus on the theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation I would also like to say a little about the biblical understanding of justice and peace.

In the bible, “justice” and “injustice” are used primarily to describe relationships between people, both one-to-one relationships and also relationships between groups. Justice and injustice are seen in the quality of these relationships. A just relationship is above all one which is loving, truthful, compassionate and forgiving, for God is love, God is truth, God is compassionate and God is forgiving.

“Justice” therefore denotes a state in which relationships are balanced, harmonious and mutual, relationships in which each and every person has the freedom to develop their God-given potential as human beings, whereas the terms “injustice” and “sin” both refer to broken and unbalanced relationships. “Injustice” denotes an unbalanced relationship in which one person or group is dominant over another, thereby preventing the victims of the injustice from realizing their God-given potential as human beings and as children of God.

And of course, as we know, our history as human beings has been characterised by examples of unbalanced relationships, relationships in which the domination of power, money, greed, selfishness, racism, sexism, colonialism, exclusion of out groups all hold sway : relationships, in other words, that are defined by any or all the cultural patterns of domination. And that is what constitutes real biblical injustice.

It is clear, then, that there is a subtle difference between the biblical notion of justice and the secular definition of “justice”. The biblical notion of justice is exemplified by Micah’s beautiful injunction that we must “*act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God*”. ¹¹The Hebrew word for justice in this sense is *tsedeq* (to live in harmonious balanced relationship, to live in “righteousness”.) The secular notion of justice has more of an emphasis on judging people according to a standard (law) and then giving them what they are entitled to and deserve. There is a Hebrew word for this kind of forensic justice It is *mishpat* . But that word *mishpat* is used in a

completely different context than Micah's for example, or in the psalms. Generally speaking, in the Bible, justice is not primarily a legal or legalistic concept. The core biblical concept of justice is to live in harmonious, mutual, respectful, loving and balanced relationships with one another, particularly with the needy, the poor and the oppressed.

And of course the fruit of that "living justly" is peace, the Hebrew word here being of course *shalom*. *Shalom* is usually translated into English as peace, but in fact in Hebrew it has a broader meaning and refers to a "*state of fulfilment resulting from God's presence and his covenantal relationship.*"¹²

Shalom actually implies a sense of relational harmony, completeness, and wholeness of the whole community of God. It is relational and communal, and it is to be fostered and found between persons and between persons and their environment. So, we can see that there is a clear connection between biblical justice (acting towards all persons and towards creation in a way that produces harmony and balance) and biblical peace – *shalom* – which is the relational, communal, fruit of acting justly.

So, in addition to our themes of reconciliation and integration and wholeness, we can now add the connected theme of *relationships*, relationships that are based on Micah's three pillars of acting with justice, loving tenderly (i.e. with loving kindness; the Hebrew word is *khesed*, and is most often applied to God's loving kindness towards us, what we often translate as mercy), and "*walking humbly with your God*". (The Hebrew word here is *haseneah* and the phrase means to "*live attentively, thoughtfully, and watchfully with your God*"¹³; thoughtful, attentive and watchful not to self but to the needs of others as seen by God.)

As a psychologist, in addition to helping people reconcile and integrate opposing aspects of their personalities, I am aware that psychological distress and disruption are often about relationships, relationships with self, with significant others, and with the past. So psychological wellbeing is very much about balanced relationships.

And, as we've seen, from a spiritual perspective, Thomas Merton talks about contemplation being about seeking and discovering our true relationships with God, with self, and with the world.

And finally the biblical notions of justice and peace are both all about relating towards each other and creation in a way that reflects the harmony of God's life and covenant.

Which brings me to those core truths of our faith which, above all else, are about relationship, as well as about wholeness, and reconciliation and justice and peace, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, both of which are our human attempts to express, on the one hand, the eternal, intimate dynamic *relationship* within the Godhead itself, and, on the other, the relationship God has forged with our humanity in Christ. Taken together, these truths are not only the object of our faith and the focus for the contemplative life; for us, as Christians, they are also the source of any true life of justice and peace as well as the ground for our concern for all creation.

Trinitarian theology teaches us that from all eternity, God's love is an eternal giving love, a love that by definition has to reach out beyond itself; and, because it has to reach out beyond itself, it has, again by definition, to be a love that is in constant relationship; a love that has to be in constant *reciprocal* relationship. It cannot by its very nature be anything else. That, in essence, is what *defines* God: a love that is in constant reciprocal relationship, eternally and presently reaching out beyond itself. So this self-giving love that comes from what Christ himself and all Christians since have called the Father (the begetter of this love), flows out to what is eternally born of that love, the eternal fruit of that love, what is begotten by that love, what (and Whom) Christians have always called the Son. But not only does the mystery of that love eternally flow out towards the Son, it is eternally reciprocated by the Son. And that reciprocal love is so perfect that it too is "personified" and called by Christians the Holy Spirit. (Technically called "perichoresis" or mutual indwelling.)

This notion of God as Trinity is not a static thing; it is a dynamic process of constant eternal mutually self-giving love. The earliest writer to use the words "mystical theology", Dionysius, refers to the Trinity as divine "*yearning or longing in love*"¹⁴. So, by its very nature, it has to continue constantly reaching out further and further. And so we have creation. And so also we have Incarnation – the self-giving love that reaches out into creation and becomes human in Christ.

And according to Dionysius, not only is this all about the mystery of God eternally going out from the depths of divine nature first of all to create, and then to become incarnate, and bind all creation into communion, It is also about God drawing all creation back to its divine origins or source. It is about this eternal and simultaneous movement out from the centre and drawing back into the centre. This is surely a

perfect model for the Christian life, for the religious life of contemplation and justice and peace. Moving out from the centre and drawing back into the centre.

When men and women of prayer really try to understand this “divine movement”, to become fully aware of it, they can only do so by receiving it into themselves in a way that is beyond all words and signs; a way of the heart. And that is what is meant by contemplation, by the contemplative way: it is the *heart’s* understanding and grasping of the mystery of God’s love. Contemplation in the Christian tradition, then, is a particular openness to, an attitude of receptiveness towards this mysterious action of God. It is an exposure to the hidden unity of God’s “‘going forth’ and then returning into the hiddenness of the “divine life-in-itself”. And the point made by all the great mystics including Teresa of Avila, and expressed in Merton’s writings as well, is that the fruit of that contemplation is the Christian imperative to become part of that Christ-centred incarnational movement of God out into the world, into creation, reaching out, in Christ – in the Heart of Christ - towards all humankind, and bringing His justice (His way of relating) and His peace (His shalom – His peace that is about relational harmony and community within the Trinity and among the community of humankind.). The contemplative life above all takes us to the very heart of this ebb and flow between the inner life of God and the incarnation of that life, through Christ, in all creation.

When he is writing about Teresa of Avila, Rowan Williams has a lovely phrase, a phrase, I think, born of a real spiritual insight into the meaning of Christian mysticism, or, the contemplative life, and it echoes much of what we’ve just been saying:

*“But, ultimately,” (he says) “understanding her [Teresa] means understanding what it meant for her to be a ‘contemplative’, which, as she saw it, was essentially a matter of the **sustained awareness of living within the movement of God’s love into creation through the life and death of Jesus Christ.**”¹⁵*

There are echoes here of the words in the RSCJ Chapter document that we’ve quoted already:

“When we contemplate the heart of Christ we enter into the movement of the Spirit who develops in us a listening heart, bringing us closer to God’s reality, with the desire to promote justice, peace and the care of creation”

And, again referring to understanding Teresa of Avila’s writings

on mysticism, Rowan Williams goes on to say:

“That understanding....depends on the ‘living book’ of lives lived in the Christian tradition of prayer and compassion.”¹⁶

In other words for Teresa, and all the other Christian mystics, including Meister Eckhart for example, the acid test of the contemplative life is not visions or ecstasies but whether or not the experience of direct contact with God is reflected in leading a fully Christian life of love and compassion, of justice leading to peace. The ultimate test is the examination of our lives as a whole.

Only in this way are the contemplative and the active, the inner and the outer, the life of prayer and contemplation and a life of justice and peace and concern for all creation truly reconciled and integrated. And only in that way, perhaps, is it truly possible to live a consecrated life that *“springs from a compelling love written in our hearts by the Spirit”*

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 - 4 Notes from retreat given by Merton to superiors of contemplative nuns Gethsemani 1967. Collection of Sr Therese Lentfoehr (1967)
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 - 7 Shannon,W. op.cit. p 83
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 - 13 ibid.p.77
 - 14 Pseudo-Dionysius : The Complete Works 1V,13,712A, p.82 trans. Luibhead and Rorem (1987) NY Paulist Press, quoted in Mystical Theology by Mark A McIntosh Blackwell Publishing 1998 (2006) pp167-8
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PROPHETIC VOICES AS A LEAVEN FOR GOOD IN A HURTING WORLD

Sr. Deirdre Mullan, RSM

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Presentation to the Conference of Religious of England and Wales (COREW),
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Original in English

For those who do not know me, my name is Deirdre Mullan and I am the Mercy International representative at the United Nations in New York. I am a national of Ireland and come from a city with two names: Derry /Londonderry, in the North of Ireland. I am a teacher by profession, a Roman Catholic by tradition and a Sister of Mercy by life-choice.

Over the past eight years, I have spent my life working as the main representative of the Sisters of Mercy at the UN. I have had the opportunity to travel and see firsthand what is happening in many parts of our world. Without a doubt, we live in a time of great anguish and uncertainty: a time of poverty, global insecurity, the Haiti disaster; severe climate change and the economic collapse of monetary systems to name but a few of the challenges we face each day.

But while many situations remain dire and progress is slow, what I have seen and experienced personally makes me believe that *another world* is possible. I am moved by the sentiments expressed by the poet Adrienne Rich, who wrote:

“My heart is moved by all I cannot save:

So much has been destroyed

*I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with
no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.”¹*

My presentation to you will be in three parts but before I move into the main body of my presentation I wish to refer briefly to the aim of the Conference of Religious of England and Wales

- seeks to be a dynamic and proactive presence of Church, particularly with those on the margins of society. and
- to unite its membership in collaborative initiatives translating gospel vision into reality, and to offer support to those in positions of leadership
- to address current issues from a Catholic perspective, acting as a prophetic voice on behalf of religious.

And so to my presentation which is in three parts:

1. Religious Men and Women and prophetic voices who act as a Leaven for Good in a Hurting World – who believe that **The Vision Still Has Its Time” (Habakkuk: 2:2-4)**
2. Catholic Social Teaching – The Church’s best kept secret.
3. Another world is possible and that the Vision still has its time

1. Prophetic Voices

The philosopher John Hicks argues that “incarnation” should be understood as a metaphor for human life rather than the term applied uniquely to Jesus. All human beings have the potential to “incarnate” or “live out” truths, values and love that reflect a divine reality at work within us. Jesus offers us extraordinary insights into the nature of God. He offers life-giving insights about the manner of our relationships with God, with all of creation and with each other. We who profess to be Christian would do well to listen to and promote Jesus’ message of salvation in ways that link it primarily with **this** world, not the world to come.”²

In 1948, the UN General Assembly ratified the Declaration of Human Rights. The thirty Articles of the Declaration proper state that all people have a right to freedom and liberty; that no one shall be enslaved or held in servitude, or subjected to torture or cruel and degrading punishment.

By definition, human rights apply to everyone who belongs to our species, wherever they are found in our world. Concern for human rights, while not a recent phenomenon, has been grossly uneven throughout its history. Along with gross violations of human rights,

there are also the endless indignities that billions endure.

What human beings all over the world want is universal: security, the ability to support their families, educational opportunities, affordable food, clean water, sanitation and access to health care.

At the Millennium Summit in 2000, the UN Member States agreed on eight goals - the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - that call for national action and international cooperation to provide access to food, education, healthcare and economic opportunities for children, women and men everywhere. In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders resolved to halve, by 2015, the number of people living on less than \$1 a day and also to set targets in the fight against poverty and disease. For many people the Millennium Development Goals represent a major landmark in public policy-making because these eight goals:

- Set international targets for reducing global poverty
- Set the target to lift 500 million people out of poverty by 2015
- Represent a synthesis of many of the most important commitments made separately at international conferences and summits during the 1990s.

However, the implementation of these MDGs is dependent on all those of us who believe that another world is possible. Healing the wounds of the earth and its people does not require saintliness or a political party - only gumption and persistence. At a time when people feel powerless, an altruistic approach can be a balm because it reveals the power of helpful and humble acts. It is a reminder that constructive changes in human affairs arise from intention, not coercion.

Speaking at the UN, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said:

*"...**People of faith** are on the front lines of efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest and bridge chasms of ignorance and misunderstanding. Religious groups can also be powerful advocates in mobilizing political leaders and the public at large... I look to religious leaders and scholars everywhere to work hand in hand with us in that mission."*³

People of faith are key to achieving the MDGs. They know that malnutrition, ill health, lack of education and lack of economic power violate human dignity, and every day they turn conviction into action by caring for the neediest and most vulnerable. Religious communities have done more than any others to make us aware of the sheer scale of human suffering in our world, and of our duty to end it. People in

the pews must help to create the political will needed to translate this rhetoric into reality.

My question to you today as leaders is: How might we do this? What are we afraid of? How can we help our members move beyond parochialism to global thinking and action? In part answer to this question, I turn to the second part of my presentation:

2. Catholic Social Teaching – The Church’s best kept secret.

“We are, in church and in society, in big trouble,” writes the renowned scripture scholarship, Walter Brueggemann.⁴

The abuse scandal of the past twenty years or so have served as a tipping point for a new era in Catholic life. We are in need of a brave “redemptive honesty” if we are to move as a Church toward the vision of Jesus Christ. We can taste the winds of discontent and accusation while we stumble one way and then in another, disoriented and discouraged. We know in our bones that the present trouble is like no other and we also know in our bones that God is with us in our place of exile. Those who have experienced exile tell me that when in exile, they are thrown back on their foundations, on their understanding of what matters most. I believe that at such a time and in such a place that we might do well to ponder and reflect on what I have described as the Churches best kept secret: **Catholic Social Teaching**

I think it is fair to say that far too many Catholics are unfamiliar with the basic content of Catholic Social Teaching. More fundamentally, many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social mission of the Church is an essential part of the Catholic faith. What, then, is the key message of Catholic Identity? “The central message is simple: our faith is profoundly social. We cannot be called truly ‘Catholic’ unless we hear and heed the call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace.”⁵

As I look at the ideas enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals and the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, I often ask myself: **What if** we really lived by and tried to embody these teachings? Catholic Social Teaching – often described as the Church’s best kept secret – underscores many of the principles outlined in the Millennium Declaration. For example,

Pope John Paul II in *The Social Concern of the Church (Sollicitudo Rei Sociales)*, 1987, wrote

“One of the great challenges to authentic human development is the reality of the miseries of poverty or economic underdevelopment existing side-by-side with the inadmissible super-development which involves consumerism and waste.”

In that same document we are told:

“Solidarity... is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are really responsible for all.”

Pope John Paul II in *One Hundred Years (Centesimus Annus)*, 1991, said:

“At the national level, promoting community and the common good requires creating employment for all, caring for the less privileged, and providing for the future.

At the global level, it increasingly requires analogous interventions on behalf of the whole human family. The social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but a motivation for action.”

In *Economic Justice for All*, 1986, the US Bishops issued a similar message when they said:

“No one may claim the name Christian and be comfortable in the face of hunger, homelessness, insecurity and injustice found in this country and in the world.”

Pope John Paul II in the *Social Concern of the Church (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)*, 1987, stated very clearly that:

“If development is the new name for peace, war and preparations for war are the major enemy of the healthy development of peoples. If we take the common good of all humanity as our norm, instead of individual greed, peace would be possible.”

And in a *Call to Action (Octogesima Adveniens)*, 1971, Pope Paul VI said:

“Let every person examine themselves, to see what they have done up to now, and what they ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words lack real weight unless they are accompanied by effective action.”

Finally, in *Called to Global Solidarity*, 1997, the US Catholic

Conference said:

“Cain’s question, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ has global implications and is a special challenge for our time, touching not one brother but all sisters and brothers. Are we responsible for the fate of the world’s poor? Do we have duties to suffering people in far-off-places? Must we respond to the needs of suffering refugees in distant nations? Are we keepers of the creation for future generations?”

For the followers of Jesus, the answer is an unequivocal YES.”

“It has already been pointed out,” wrote Karl Rahner, “that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or s/he will not exist at all.”⁶ Rahner’s prediction is proving prophetic. We who belong to religious communities know that the current crisis makes all the more urgent the need to be still, to quiet our souls, to wait prayerfully – for a certain contemplative quiet is necessary for the voice of the Spirit to be heard. Living contemplatively may well save our sanity in a spirit-crushing, fast paced society in which we live. Such mindfulness has the power to melt our fear so that we can act and be faithful to our prophetic calling, to preach and teach the gospel. The living Christ continues to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. The voice of the church, wounds and scandalizes when it does not “speak the truth in love.” It fails its mission when it denies the reality of issues that affect the lives of its members.

3. Another World is Possible: The Vision Still has its Time

If we believe that another world is possible and that the Vision of Jesus Christ still has its time - Why do so many of us/our members stay locked into a spirituality that looks for God in the heavens? Why not turn instead to a spirituality that focuses on God within and among us, urging and prompting us to claim our sacred identity – and to live it in the belief that the Vision of Jesus Christ still has its time?

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching and the United Nations Millennium Declaration both read well. Indeed, an extra-terrestrial beaming in and reading either document would surely wonder: If the leaders are so full of good intentions, and express them collectively, why does Planet Earth continue to be the way it is?

A year after the Millennium Declaration was signed, New York was in turmoil. But this was not the beginning. The previous twenty odd years had been little short of disaster for world development, and

the decade before the dawn of the new millennium had been remarkably unsettled. The 1990s started with the first Iraq war. The decade was punctuated at regular intervals with major economic and financial crises. Europe experienced a financial crisis in 1992; Mexico in 1994; Thailand, Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia in 1997 and 1998; Brazil in 1999. Each crisis cost billions of dollars in bail-outs, which usually went disproportionately to the rich, while workers and small-time savers suffered. The Soviet Union disintegrated and the subsequent 'transition' was marked by some of the most spectacular economic social declines. In the mid-1990s, there was a crisis of a different kind in Rwanda. Natural disasters seemed to occur with increasing frequency – floods, hurricanes, earthquakes. The implications of HIV were now registered with a dire prognosis for Africa and Asia. And all the time, the open wounds of Palestine went untended. Alongside this, there was an air of market triumphalism and fundamentalism: capitalism was the only game in town.

In the light of this quick analysis of the situation on Planet Earth, we might well ask:

*“How is one to live a moral and compassionate existence when one is fully aware of the blood, the horror inherent in life, when one finds darkness not only in one’s culture but within oneself? If there is a stage at which an individual life becomes truly adult, it must be when one grasps the irony in its unfolding and accepts responsibility for a life lived in the midst of such paradox. One must live in the middle of contradiction, because if all contradictions were eliminated at once life would collapse. There are simply no answers to some of the great pressing questions. You continue to live them out, making your life a worthy expression of **leaning into the light.**”⁷*

At the beginning of this section, I posed the question:

Why do we stay locked into a spirituality that looks for God in the heavens? Why not turn instead to a spirituality that focuses on God within and among us, urging and prompting us to claim our sacred identity – and to live it in the belief that the Vision of Jesus Christ still has its time?

This, my friends is the crux of the matter. If more of us, both in the pews and out of the pews, believed that Christian living is inescapably connected with concern for the poor, the Vision of God might yet become a reality. The prophets of old made it clear that God is not

interested in ritual or sacrifice as such. In Amos we read:

“I hate, I despise your festivals... Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them... Take away from me the noise of your songs... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (5:21-24)

If we believe that the sacred and the secular are not distinct realms, and that faith and decent living are linked, a troubling question for me - for us - is whether our lives are distinguishable from the general attitudes of society toward the really poor in our midst. In a public address at Boston College, the theologian Bernard Cooke asked whether Catholicism has “lost its soul.”⁸ His point was that as Catholics have moved up the social ladder of economic success, they have, in general, accepted uncritically today’s social attitudes toward the disadvantaged. Yes, we respond generously to charitable appeals, but the effective power and compassion of Jesus has to be seen working against and challenging the political, social, economic, and even religious powers that disadvantage people in systemic ways.

Perhaps, too much of our moral focus as Catholics has been on individuality morality. I believe that today, more than ever, we are being called upon to challenge social and economic systems which exploit and dehumanize. If Eucharist does not lead to another world where all people are included, then Eucharist is a sham.

This truth is beautifully captured in a passage by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*, in his book *Wind, Sand and Stars (Terre des Hommes)*. The author is on a train journey before the start of the Second World War. The first-class carriages were empty, but the third-class carriages were crowded with Polish workmen being sent home from France:

“Looking at them I said to myself that they had lost half of their human quality. These people had been knocked about from one end of Europe to the other by economic currents...”

A baby lay at the breast of a mother so weary that she seemed asleep. Life was being transmitted in the shabbiness and the disorder of this journey. I looked at the father. A powerful skull as naked as a stone. A body hunched over in uncomfortable sleep, imprisoned in working clothes, all humps and hollows. The man looked like a lump of clay, like one of those sluggish and shapeless derelicts that crumple into sleep in our public markets.

And I thought: The problem does not reside in this poverty, in this

filth, in this ugliness. But this same man and this same woman met one day. This man must have smiled at this woman.

He may, after his work was done, have brought her flowers. Timid and awkward, perhaps he trembled lest she disdain him. And this woman, sure of her charms, perhaps took pleasure in teasing him. And this man, this man who is now no more than a machine for swinging a pick or a sledgehammer, must have felt in his heart a delightful anguish. The mystery is that they should have become these lumps of clay. Into what terrible mould were they forced? What is it that corrupts this wonderful clay of which the human is kneaded?

I sat down face to face with the couple. Between the man and the woman a child had hollowed himself out a place and fallen asleep. He turned in his slumber, and in the dim lamplight I saw his face. What an adorable face! A golden fruit had been born of these two peasants... a miracle of delight and grace.

I bent over the smooth brow, over those mildly pouting lips, and I said to myself: This is a musician's face. This is the child Mozart. This is a life full of beautiful promise. Little princes in legends are not different from this; protected, sheltered, cultivated what could this child become?

When by mutation a new rose is born in a garden, all the gardeners rejoice. They isolate the rose, tend it, and foster it. But alas there is no gardener for humanity. This little Mozart will be shaped like the rest by the common stamping machine. This little Mozart will love shoddy music in the stench of night dives. This little Mozart is condemned. I went back to the sleeping car. I said to myself: Their fate causes these people no suffering. It is not an impulse to charity that has upset me like this. I am not weeping over an eternally open wound. Those who carry the wound do not feel it. It is the human race and not the individual that is wounded here, is outraged here. I do not believe in pity. What torments me tonight is the gardener's point of view. What torments is not this poverty to which after all a man can accustom himself as easily as sloth... What torments me is not the humps nor the hollows, nor the ugliness. It is the sight, a little bit in all these people of Mozart murdered. What torments me tonight is the sight of little Mozart..."⁹

And I am sure that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry would not mind my adding these thoughts to his story:

- What might happen if this little Mozart were to encounter the best of Catholic Social Teaching and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals?
- Perhaps what we need is the gardener's point of view – and to network with other gardeners who offer ways of disentangling what appear to be insoluble dilemmas; poverty, global climate change, terrorism, ecological degradation and many more. Our world seems to be looking for the big solution, which is itself part of the problem since the most effective solutions are both local and systemic.

I would like to share with you a story told by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, the great moral voice of our time.

“One of the Just Men of Sodom determined to save its inhabitants from sin and punishment. Night and day he walked the streets and markets preaching (and teaching) against greed and theft, falsehood and indifference. In the beginning, people listened and smiled ironically. Then they stopped listening: he no longer even amused them. The killers went on killing, the wise kept silent...

One day a child, moved by compassion for the unfortunate preacher, approached him with these words: ‘Poor stranger. You shout, you extend yourself body and soul; don’t you see that it is hopeless?’

‘Yes, I see,’ answered the Just Man.

‘Then why do you go on?’

‘I’ll tell you why. In the beginning I thought I could change (men and women). Today, I know that I cannot. If I still shout today, if I still scream, it is to prevent (the politicians and the pundits, the movie stars and ‘image makers’, the indecent and the indifferent), from ultimately changing me.’

That is why I speak – not so much to change them, but so they do not change me. The essence of being a HUMAN being is never to give into despair. Never to give up. Never to stop shouting.

And never to let them change me.¹⁰

I offer this story because I believe that we need to ask - and continue asking - who is influencing and changing whom in our world today?

I also believe that too many of us are notoriously naïve and ignorant about the systemic/institutional nature of sin and suffering in our world. The root cause of much of the injustice is not unjust deeds done

by individual people, but oppressive social and institutional forces that compel people into acting immorally, and even oppressively, towards each other. In many parts of the world, governments themselves are the most corrupt and corrupting of influences. And the mainstream religions are not without their internalized oppressions, often fostering the values and strategies of war, sexism, exclusion and patriarchal domination.

Extreme poverty is an abuse of human rights. As the BBC correspondent Fergal Keane said:

“After the Iraq war and with the terrible abandonment of Darfur, it is easy to think that international law is bunkum. The powerful or the most ruthless decide how things will work. I disagree. The infrastructure of international justice is small; the pressure not to investigate or call to account is great. But there is a community of conscience – organized, passionate but also practical which will not go away.

*In matters of human rights abuse, the destruction of the planet or world hunger **there is not the option for despair**. You recognize the contradictions, the hypocrisies, the defeats, but you go on. There is no other civilized choice.”¹¹*

In a globalised world of trans-national corporations, where so much exploitation takes place, and where governments often collude with trans-national forces, it is easy for people to feel helpless. But with utter defiance we cannot capitulate to such an erosion of hope. We need, therefore, to be very vigilant about the quality of our thinking, even in small things, and we need to ensure that we regularly feed our minds and nurture our spirit with constructive and creative ideas.

We know that **Action** follows thought and ideas, and that if enough people begin to think differently and imagine more laterally, in time we will create the conditions for

transformative change. In this way, we can contribute to building up a new envelope of consciousness in the human community. Yes, we believe that another world is possible.

We also know that networking is an essential organizational survival skill for the future. As major institutions break, networks are likely to emerge as the creative alternative. So, too, for living in a more just way. Beyond the paltry efforts of some governments to engage with the questions of our time, a great deal is being achieved by creative networks of NGOs, who name and engage with the crucial issues of our

time with a clarity that can put governments to shame.

We may work locally, but it is always with our eyes on the global, because we know that the human spirit was never meant to live with so much fear and helplessness. We work, believing firmly that another world is possible. Ours is a call to access the incarnation moment in every human encounter.

More than anything else, our call is to be global witnesses to the reign of God and it should never be subjugated to the norm and laws of any one political or religious system. Our accountability is to the entire people of the earth. Confining ourselves to religious enclaves is an act of blasphemy; it flies in the face of the God of compassion. Who is the God of All.

“Let us break out of the narrow confines of that spirituality that focused on individual salvation and allow our hearts to be touched by the God of unconditional love who sends us to our brothers and sisters who are hurting. The whole world is held in the deep embrace of the God of unconditional love. Only by engaging with a vision as large and as deep as this can we help heal the scars of our violent destructibility.”¹²

We stand on the brink of human extinction and boast that we seek the God of life.

Millions dead; trillions of dollars used for the destruction of each others; thousands of peoples roaming the planet seeking for a place to call home; In the midst of all of this suffering there is something else happening. There is talk of a *kairos* moment- a transformation moment, a time when the best of the human spirit is seeking something better.

DO you believe that we are indeed in a Kairos moment?

The development of a global society for all calls for the cultivation of capacities far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster.

“Given the interconnectedness of systems, the globalization of human life, the universalism of experience and the economics of national and international politics, we need people who are prepared to think differently.

To say that we care about the poor in this world and never read an article on debt; to say that we care about the planet and never learn a thing about ecology; to say that we care about refugees and do nothing about this smacks of pallid conviction at best. Simply to do things is

not enough anymore. The world needs thinkers who take thinking as a spiritual discipline.”¹³

As leadership people, called to discipleship by a co-creative God, we need to grapple with the signs of our times.

Living in a sustainable way encapsulates several important concepts that challenge the violence that we are seeking to outgrow. The notion of sustainability requires each of us and all of us to reclaim real ownership of the goods entrusted to our care.

As I write this, I am aware that the word “ownership” has a paradoxical ring to it. It oscillates between possessiveness that all too quickly can become ferocious consumerist greed and our human temporality which time and again reminds us that we really own nothing. The gross abuse of the planet’s finite resources means that we are engulfed in a dark and frightening ignorance. Unless wise people are forthcoming, the future looks bleak. Unearthing such wisdom and translating into an engaging narrative for our time is a primary challenge for those of us committed to a new world order.

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning, a new way of living together – to be prophetic voices and a haven for Good in a Hurting World;

As Clarissa Pinkola Estes reminds us...

“In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or un-mended in the world. Do not focus on that....

*Your task is not to fix the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world within your reach. Let us take one step at a time. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is the accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take **everyone on earth** to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.*

*One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to **stand up and show your soul...** Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you can help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do. Remember, there will always be times*

when you feel discouraged. In the early days, I too have felt discouraged. I have often felt despair but I did not keep a chair for it; I would not entertain it. It was not allowed to eat from my plate.

The reason is this: In my uttermost bones I knew something as you do. There can be no despair when you remember why we are on this Earth, who we serve, and who sent us here. The good words we say and the good deeds we do are not ours:

They are the words and deeds of the One who brought us here.”¹⁴

My question to you today is this:

Are we providing each other and our membership with the challenge to live a more authentic Christian Life by reading the Signs of our Times?

Or are we the ones “standing by” as the truth is stoned?

In conclusion: I remind you of the words of the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon...

“People of faith are on the front lines of efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest and bridge chasms of ignorance and misunderstanding. Religious groups can also be powerful advocates in mobilizing political leaders and the public at large... I look to religious leaders and scholars everywhere to work hand in hand with us in that mission.”¹⁵

Yes I do believe: The Vision Still Has Its Time and Yes some of us are and will continue to be... ***Prophetic voices and a Leaven for Good in a Hurting World.***

Let us seize this opportunity.

¹ Adrienne Rich, “Natural Resources,” *The Dream of the Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p.60.

² John Hicks, *The Metaphor of God: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1993).

³ Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN speaking to the General Assembly, September 2008.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 67.

- ⁵ *Communities of Salt and Light*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1993.
- ⁶ Karl Rahner *Concern for the Church*, *Theological Studies* xx, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 149
- ⁷ Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, Prayer Service, CCUN, UN September 2007.
- ⁸ Bernard Cooke, *Eucharist and the Call to Justice*, Public address at Boston College, July 23, 1996.
- ⁹ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, 1992), pp. 226-229.
- ¹⁰ Elie Wiesel in an address to the UN on International Peace Day, September 21, 2007.
- ¹¹ Fergal Keane, BBC Correspondent, speaking at the UN, April 2007.
- ¹² Maria, Harris, *Proclaim Jubilee • Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, 1994.
- ¹³ Joan Chittister, OSB from *Fire in these ashes – a spirituality of Contemporary religious life*.
- ¹⁴ Words from Clairissa Pinkola Estes – International Catholic Organization, 3 November 2007. New York.
- ¹⁵ Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN speaking to the General Assembly, September 2008.

THE DIGITAL ERA: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

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Original in Spanish

The latest discourse of Benedict XVI on the World Day of Social Communications dealt courageously and in great missionary openness with the theme of the new technologies of communication. It seems that, in the latest discourse of the Holy See on the means of social communication, there has been a “change of tone”, traditionally more inclined towards an attitude of “prevention” before these means and their ambiguity or offering discourses on the professional deontology of journalistic work.

The great influx of the Internet in the youth sector, as well as a progressive awareness of the Church before this new and emerging world of Informatics help us understand that, in this digital age, the Church encounters one of the greatest challenges of her evangelizing mission. In this field, Benedict XVI proved to be a man of great foresight.

This article shall deal with the topic of the future of Consecrated Life, without doubt, one of the strongest ecclesial groups which, from time immemorial carries out the evangelizing work of the Church. Aware of the fact that Internet is more than a fashion, we will focus our consideration on this particular topic from a missionary perspective desirous to respond to the appeal of the Church, opening ourselves to the possibility which the digital age offers us as consecrated persons. It is necessary to know this new culture and means of communication in order to proclaim today the Gospel of love. It is necessary to know

their possibilities and their limitations so that our presence, our use of them and our mission in their regard may become more qualified, evangelically meaningful and audacious.

We will not lose sight of the perspective of knowing how to immerse ourselves in this new culture which affects, in a particular way, the new generations of consecrated persons. We shall present some questions which might be interesting for initial and permanent formation.

More than just a fashion

Digital age is not a dream. It is already here. We are immersed in it. That which, up to sometime ago we saw as tendency, is now a reality. A recent study done in the United States of the group *Common Sense Media* (July 2009) reveals that 22% of North American adolescents visit and check, more than ten times a day their Facebook, MySpace, etc. More than half of these, at least twice a day, do so through their own computer or the latest model of cellular phones. The youth of today live in this new digital culture characterized by being “always on”. 93% of adolescents from 12 to 17 years old in the United States live “on-line“. It is projected that this index will hold true, in less than two years, in the whole western world and in greater part of developed countries. In Spain, there is the phenomenon of the famous social network called “Tuenti”, which is being diffused almost “virally” among adolescents and is now causing headaches among educators.

Social networks, through Internet and the mobile phone terminals are rapidly changing the style and way of relating among the new generations. The study mentioned above concludes that the youth of today find in these networks and in text messages their primary source of socialization, going through from a “face-to-face” relationship to a “cyberspace” relationship. The younger generations are afflicted by this world of latest generation-telephones and the fascinating social networks of Internet. Day after day, we are surprised by new applications, technological devices which are continuously coming up in this sector of communications. If there is a place where the young would love to live, this is undoubtedly, the Internet.

The study reveals something else: parents (the adult world in general) live along the peripheries of all this. They ignore it, they underestimate it. Even if some adults have access to these new technologies and do not totally disclaim this phenomenon, a greater

part of them vary along positions which go from absolute ignorance or total indifference to a stunned vertiginous sense that is provoked in them by all of these. Some do not want to be pushed outside this high speed train. Others, instead, are already, irreparably, out.

Something is evident: all this is more than just a fashion. The phenomenon grows, day after day in an exponential manner. A new culture has sprung in our midst and, even if we do not know where it will lead us, it is already featuring the world in which we live and the one towards which we are moving on. In the dizzying progress of telematics, our world moves on without pause, towards a new style of life which comes from the new technologies of communication.

The young people who come to Consecrated Life fully belong to this new culture. It is necessary to understand well this phenomenon and prepare ourselves for it. Consecrated Life (which in great majority belongs to the non-digital culture) does not want to remain along the margins of this new world to which we have been introduced by these new technologies. Our mission field is deeply influenced by this emerging culture and consecrated persons do not want to remain out of this, nor allow indifference, shock or fear of the unknown leave them outside this changing and digital generation. The permanent renewal of Consecrated Life and its adjustment to the times also imply to enter in the digital culture and know it. This, and not something else, is our field of mission, the concrete space and time in which we must proclaim the God of Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II defined Internet as the “new forum”. Benedict XVI went a bit further and defined it the “digital continent”, launching the Church in a mission in this new world to conquer for the cause of the Gospel. It deals with offering to the world a new “diaconate of the culture”. The truth is that the Internet, the web, the virtual space or in whatever way it is defined is, day by day, not only the future, but the present moment of social communications and therefore, a means that can powerfully influence public opinion and the style of life.

“A human and social phenomenon of this dimension cannot but occupy and pre-occupy the Christian community. These means of communication open enormous perspectives to the evangelizing work of the Church and of Consecrated Life. The highways of digital communication are a strong instrument of intercommunication. Someone even say that not to use them in an evangelical way would be a great irresponsibility. Surely, this phenomenon – as all which is human – cannot remain foreign to the community of the followers of Jesus. “For

somebody who, in the name of the Risen Christ, commits himself to care for every human being, no way can be and must be excluded”, Benedict XVI affirmed.

It seems that, according to the words of the Pope, we find ourselves before a “new history” to build, at the dawning of a new world in which the words of Jesus Christ resound once more with greater force: “Go out to all the world and preach the Good News”.

Internet appears as this great space in which the Pauline expression is realized: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!”(1 Cor 9,16). It is a new mission *ad gentes* in which these words of the Apostle also resound within us: “How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” (Rom 10,11.13-15).

Vision in focus

In view of this, it is of fundamental importance to focus our vision. Mission depends on that vision! How different are the actions to make, the solutions to take and conclusions at the end, according to our vision, perception or analysis of reality! It is all the more necessary to put the vision well into focus in order to succeed in programming.

I have chosen to use the word “opportunity” for this article instead of the word “challenge” which is more widely used, because I believe that the repeated use of the word “challenge” sometimes orients the vision of reality in a determined direction which does not convince me.

May be it is only in a vague sense, but I have the impression that in Consecrated Life (and in the life of the Church in general) everything seems to be transformed into a challenge: community life, interculturality, living the vows, evangelization, education, spiritual life, means of communication and the new technologies... it seems that nothing can escape this fanciful and provocative vision.

Consecrated life might have the sensation of living almost exhausted – as in a permanent obstacle race - when everything becomes a challenge or, one simply feels incapable of confronting the novelty with creativity and serenity. The fact is, without wanting it, the world is transforming itself into a giant difficult to demolish and which can provoke even if only subtly, a rejection of the reality which we are called to evangelize. I believe that we have to win over this temptation of considering the

world of the means of communication and the new technologies as a challenge or a disproportionate provocation and adventure in order to live open to what is new and to the future.

A second temptation which I believe we must avoid at this moment of focusing our vision to confront the future of consecrated life, is that of looking with suspicion at this new culture, concentrating too much on the dangers which hide the network and the limitations ensuing from the use or abuse of new technologies and the new forms of communication.

Men and women with a wider vision know how to see “opportunities” where others might see difficulties, threats or dangers. Such are our Founders during their time and many other men and women who have undertaken a journey of trust in order to realize daring and ambitious projects. Such are many of our brothers and sisters who, giving up their own way of being at the “darker side” of reality, know how to move on to a place of light in which life and mission are lived in joy, looking at the world with faith and hope.

New possibilities

In a span of few years, we have assisted at the birth of innumerable types of webpage and systems, blog and virtual developments which have increased the possibility of communication and relationship. They have converted the network into a place where practically, one can do everything.

In Consecrated Life, already for some years now, we are using the Internet, the e-mail and the telephone systems Voip through Skype, VoipBuster... to communicate. Surely, we have discovered in these means many potentials for communication, interaction or participating in the network. We have created webpages of our own Congregations and of our mission works. The pastoral and evangelization initiatives are many and many religious want to realize all these through these means of communication. Even the Pope himself encourages us in his latest message for the World Day of Social Communications to use this “new generation of the means of communication: photo, video, animation, blog, websites for evangelization and catechesis.”

On the web, one can buy and sell, inform and distort, be entertained, maintain open relationships or hide behind anonymity, bless and curse, build and sabotage. They can also have sex. It is possible to listen to music, study, get informed, end isolation and solitude. It is also possible

to promote friendship and create family or community, interact with whoever we like, with other members of our Institute and keep in touch with those who seem distant. One can also speak of God, pray, organize meetings and even have spiritual guidance. Everything is possible.

Regarding information, experts affirm that the Internet has broken the paradigm of traditional communication and its unidirectionality, offering a space of information, of freedom of expression and opinions yet unknown. Anyone may have access to the information in every part of the world with a speed never before imagined. The more languages one has, the wider is the field for communicating. It is also possible to create one's own means of communication or expression or at least participate in the many forums and debates which are open in any part of the network. There are no more secrets. Any anonymous chronicler may offer news and opinions, in any blog or forum. Many barriers of control are broken and new frontiers are open to arrive at the truth. Any indiscretion is diffused at once and an anonymous comment could facilitate information or have its social influence. Without doubt, we find ourselves before a new scenario in communications in which the world of emotions has more importance than the information itself.

Contrary to what some may think, the network is not a space which is particularly "harmful", but, as Benedict XVI said in one of his last messages for the World Day of Social Communication, "a potential which, if well used becomes a gift". It is simply a reflection of that which our world is, with the same lights and shadows which every reality possesses. There is no need to become suspicious of what is new, but rather discover that which is at the bottom of all this.

Our use of the network is none other than the actuation of the fundamental and constant tendency of the human being to go beyond oneself, end his/her isolation and enter into a relationship with others. This, according to me, is the key to understand what is behind this complex but fascinating phenomenon. Today people try, perhaps more than ever before, to escape from loneliness and interact with fellow human beings. Helping to promote real communication, communion and cooperation in this virtual world, is without doubt, part of our mission as consecrated persons. It is not a matter of being there to stay in the network or to simply use these means. The consecrated person must never lose sight that these media are tools at the service of evangelization and of human dignity. The focus is on the proper use of the network and not allowing ourselves to be "seduced". In the network, we are at the service of evangelization and of the dignity of the person,

promoting integral human development. Therefore, we must be very clear that the quality of human contact and the attention to the persons and their true spiritual needs will always be important, as the Pope says, The consecrated person is not just a simple user of these means. He/she is a man/woman of God, called to live in this digital world with wisdom, committing oneself to ensure the continuous flow of communication network.

Knowing the phenomenon and its limitations

However, this view of faith and hope – at times optimistic – should not lead us to be naïve or innocent. Recognizing the potential, it behooves us to explore and address these phenomena that are changing our culture and are already involving our society and the consecrated life both at the personal and communitarian levels. We must seek a deeper understanding of this potential since they are to be used with responsibility. We must never forget that the use of the means depends on the persons who use them.

The fact that there are more opportunities to interact and communicate does not mean that good relationships have been established or that the content of the messages circulating in the network is worthwhile. What could be a means to come together may actually keep people apart. At the same time, it may also be true that while being in relationship with others, one can be very lonely or isolated. Web information can also be subjected to interested manipulation and misinformation. Add to that the fact that audiovisual media have a greater influence in the world of sensations and feelings. What could be a means of relationship could also be a means of escape. The same community of Consecrated Life may be altered and influenced by the use of these means to escape or to search for relationships outside the community. Though this may be something good, it may have its repercussions in the deterioration of relationships within our communities.

This new dynamic world requires a new understanding and a new way of living relationships, which is ultimately, what lies behind all this. It is necessary to have codes of ethics so that these powerful tools and technologies may be used with correct ethical principles. Much of the interactions in the digital world is remote, and this can dissolve the law of cause and effect, of action and reaction or reduce the boundaries between reality and fiction, public and private. Furthermore, digital life takes place under conditions of anonymity, making it easier to act

outside ethical norms. Obviously, “all that glitters is not gold” in the network world as well as outside of it. In the network, there is not more or less superficiality or perversion as there are outside of it. What is important is to be clear about the purpose that drives the consecrated person in order not to be captivated by the allure of these means and lose orientation. Pastoral work in the digital world must “show to people of our times that ‘God is near’ and that we all belong to each other in Christ”! (Address of Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia, Dec. 21, 2009).

By definition, these digital means and their applications in communications are characterized by participation. Users create the content and, as everything created in this digital world, it is instantly transformed into something that spreads virally and becomes interactive and accessible to a wide audience, invisible but real. The network is very entertaining and personal and this is also transforming attitudes in the life of our religious communities when it comes to time for meetings, recreation and common life.

The youth of today, and therefore the new generations coming to Consecrated Life, are growing at the center of this technological revolution. They are members of the “digital generation”, characterized by the fact that these digital means define their lives in an unprecedented way. They spend much time online, surfing, sending and receiving text messages and playing video games that are used in schools, in their assignments and with their parents. Naturally, all these profoundly influence their growth and learning patterns. The line separating the dangers from the opportunities of the digital world is very thin.

The digital media have a strong power of attraction on their users. The WHO says that 10% of cyber users become ill and spread the “tech-abuse” due to misuse of the network. The network can create new forms of dependence involving difficult relationships, irritability, increased perception and reduced ability for abstraction and symbolism. This is not to mention the time lost at the computer. Some users navigate with precise objectives and targets in the network, robbing time from their other activities. Undoubtedly, new technologies require us to reflect and to choose an active attitude in relation to the cultural change which we are experiencing, without alarm.

The traps that actually exist on the streets of cyberspace are numerous. Certainly, there is superficiality, falsehood and even perversion in the Internet – as it also happens outside of it. We have already said that in the virtual world, there is therefore, a whole world

to evangelize. We are asked to love our world and, instead of seeing the negative, to open ourselves to all the cybernauts in search for friendship, truth and goodness. Internet is – in the words of the Pope – like the “hall of the gentiles” in the Temple of Jerusalem, open to those for whom, perhaps, God is still unknown, but nourish the desire for the absolute and eternal truth.

Evangelize the network

And who are the new gentiles? What is the face of these anonymous cybernauts? What are they looking for? What do they expect from us, consecrated men and women, on the net? How do we meet and accompany them in their search?

Certainly, their faces are not well defined. Every man and woman is a world by itself. There are many routes, experiences, journeys. Many navigators admit to being indifferent, non-practicing. They do not go to Mass and do not pray. May be they wonder about some proposals which are human socialist in nature. They are far from Christianity, far from the Church. Many are now recovering interest in their faith in Jesus Christ. They speak to us about all this from the outside. God is slowly disappearing from their lives. But they continue to look for something. May be they have not verbalized everything. Despite the frivolity or being one dimensional these people are going through a spiritual quest. Their attitude is more open than what it seems. New interests have been awakened. There are doubts, uncertainties, confusion. There is a need to listen, to accept, to accompany, to propose...

We have to find in this search for others, the face of God. For missionaries – as Pope John Paul II said, contemplation is important. The missionary is above all, a witness to the experience of God. In this, we consecrated persons can bring our experience as men and women of God who have learned to be mystics in action. In this sense, we have behind us a rich charismatic legacy.

Seeking the face of God means going out to meet the others in a positive and humble attitude, free from prejudices, open to recognize God in others. Our faith must be proclaimed with a non-judgmental attitude, but with the attitude of a witness; not as soldiers, but as messengers of Peace, ambassadors of a God who is more than we can ever think or say.

This does not mean hiding who we really are. We must be honest

and show the network what we really are in order to accept and respect differences. The attitude of dialogue is the most appropriate. A dialogue which tries to understand the difference, the genuine appreciation of beliefs different from one's own, which welcomes also the questions that the personal faith of the other provoke in the life of one's personal experience.

It is essential to be able to relativise and discover that there is much more that unites us than what separates us from those who do not yet believe. The true believer knows that he is in search. He knows that he is journeying. God is present in my interlocutor. Because of this, we need great humility because faith is a gift which makes one vulnerable as it was with Jesus.

Formation in the digital age

The new generations coming to Consecrated Life today belong to this new digital generation. It becomes all the more important for us to put ourselves into action, forming ourselves to understand this culture in order to accompany the new generations of religious men and women in their formative process. Moreover, it is useful to establish, in the formative itinerary and in the permanent formation of communities, simple processes that may help to discern, to appreciate and create critical and responsible users. The whole of formation, in this sense is useful and appropriate.

We are not entirely strangers to the digital world. Undoubtedly, the technologies are growing at such a speed that it is not difficult to come down from this high-speed train which we have described earlier. It requires continuous updating and "digital literacy" which will help us understand better this phenomenon and be able to continue to form the new generations. However, we should not overestimate the need for this "digital literacy". It is not necessary to know the latest technologies and applications in the network world in order to sufficiently understand the phenomenon and know roughly or rudimentary, the principles of its use and operation.

It is important to be attentive to this digital world, to the technological progress and, above all, to the cultural transformation which these means introduce. However, what is important is not so much the understanding or knowing how to use these means but the how and why we use them. We will never be able to move about in this digital world with the same ease and fluency of the younger generation.

Nor is it necessary. It is important to know that the means are not an end in itself. They are simply means. What is important is to know that the means are not an end in itself. What should worry us, as we have already said, is not the means but that which circulates through this medium and the right approach in confronting them. This is what all consecrated persons, in particular the formators, must take into consideration in this digital age. Training, know-how, counter acting and allowing oneself to be formed are important in order to form others, but the most important thing is to have clear educative principles.

It is important that starting from their formation, the new generations (including those who are not so young anymore) be accompanied towards a mature use of the new technologies as well as in organizing their time, putting emphasis on authentic relationships and the use of responsible freedom in everything.

As we have said, what matters most is the type of relationships established, the right use of these media and the contents diffused and consumed in the network. Technologies are nothing else but means called to be utilized with responsibility towards authentic and humanizing relationships. The basic criterion of formation must therefore be to form towards responsible freedom which appeals to the human common sense and according to the potential of the persons under formation. Here, we do not mean a “goody goody” attitude or of an infantile optimism. Here we are dealing with a glance from believing eyes which accept reality in an emerging culture. This is our culture and our world. It is the culture of the world, present and future. These are our youth and their world. Let it also be our world. It is the world loved by God and which God wants to transform with its lights and shadows. Announcing the God of Jesus Christ today and formation to the Consecrated Life of tomorrow will not be possible if it does not come from the love of this culture where we live and move and exist.

For this reason, Consecrated Life must not be afraid nor be stunned before this world of new technologies of communication. Consecrated Life is called to be open to navigate with great responsibility in this global space inhabited by millions of men and women of our time, of different age and culture, of different levels of formation, of different faiths. The Internet is, above all, an opportunity offered to us for relationship and communication.

REFLECTIONS ON CONSECRATED LIFE IN EUROPE

Judith King

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(Judith King has given this conference to the USG General Assembly on May 2010)

Original in English

Introductory words

I thank you graciously for your invitation to address you here today as you take this opportunity to joyfully and hopefully listen to the perspectives of others on consecrated life. What I am about to say to you today is the fruit of many conversations I have had with Lay Colleagues and friends since I first received this invitation, most of whom have also had close connections with Religious Congregations. I begin by acknowledging their input to my preparations.

Core Text

I was born in the extreme North West of Ireland into a household of six siblings born to practising and devout Catholic parents. I attended religiously- run primary and post primary schools and later a Mercy Sisters' Third Level College. I began my teaching career in a Primary School run by Presentation Brothers but before the end of my first year they decided to withdraw from the school, thus ending over 100 years of service. In retrospect, it is possible for me to see this decision as the first deconstruction of the local parish-school-church nexus which was

simply accepted and revered as the most powerful, formative influence in the life of my hometown community. In the subsequent twenty-five years every other religiously-run institution there made a similar decision. Today no religious -male or female- has staff involvement in any educational or health establishment in the town. Some religious still retain significant but increasingly contentious influence at the level of governance. What took place locally has been replicated nationwide. I understand that this re-positioning of religious in the social-political-cultural landscape had begun much earlier in Mainland Europe but most commentators agree that the rate of change precipitated in Ireland was unparalleled.

Irish People were beginning to adjust, accept and even welcome this substantively changed landscape and were learning to survive even the sporadic revelations of physical and sexual abuse of children which had been emerging. However, during the past nine months, Catholics in Ireland have been reeling in shock in the aftermath of the publication of judicial investigations into abuse in religiously run institutions and in the Archdiocese of Dublin ¹. It is fair to say that for very many Irish Catholics ‘things have begun to fall apart and the centre can no longer hold’² in ways previously unimaginable. Most of them are experiencing profound disillusionment and near despair at the extent of the abuse carried out by some religious and priests. Those painful emotions have been compounded by the cover-up and mismanagement perpetrated by those in leadership positions in the Catholic Church in Ireland. In his recent *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland*, Pope Benedict was sharply critical of the behaviour of the Bishops and pointed out that the scandals and their mismanagement ‘obscured the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution had succeeded in doing’³. There have been several Episcopal resignations and growing calls for more.

Many of my contemporaries would now ask: ‘How is it possible to explore the future of consecrated or religious life when the institutional Church in Ireland has been so discredited and Catholicism itself so radically called into question? As one of them put it: “They used to say ‘You cannot do theology with your back to Auschwitz’, but in Ireland, now we must agree that: ‘You cannot discuss religious life or the future of Catholicism with your back to the Ryan and Murphy reports’”. So, painful as it is, this must be my starting point and my constant reference in this presentation. From an Irish perspective it would seem that the question of religious life in the traditional sense has been somewhat relativised by our recent experience. And while I start with that painful

perspective, I do so because I believe that it is relevant to the future of Religious life in other countries of Europe. But, ultimately, of course that will be for you to judge.

For decades, it seems now, that we were being drawn towards a horizon whose lineaments we could not yet clearly perceive. But we now realise that we simply had no idea of just how treacherous the territory ahead was. Nor did we realise how devastating its impact would be on cherished certainties and seemingly unquestionable assumptions.

From Europe, we could already see elements within that horizon. These included changes in norms of religious practice ; expressions of and approaches to sexuality; the rise and attractiveness of secular culture; the sophistication of the average European adult in terms of education and life experience (including theological education); the philosophical/mythological shift towards what has been called post-modernism; the proliferation of individualistic, consumerist lifestyles with ever-increasing absorption in technological gadgets. Alongside these emerging changes in Europe and North America, Asia, had slowly but surely invested the energy and resources of its people into successfully challenging the economic might of the West. Inevitably they have begun to demand similar lifestyles to those enjoyed here for decades. Meanwhile our one Earth has been groaning under the weight of our increased exploitation and disregard. More than half the Continent of Africa, parts of Central and South America and their peoples bore the burden of trade agreements which favoured the wealthier nations and they continue to bear the full and brutal brunt of the ensuing climatic changes.

This broad canvas is known only too well to you and I know that you have indeed challenged many aspects of it for decades. Sometimes you may have sounded like voices in the wilderness as you pursued your justice and peace agenda. I refer to it here simply to remind myself and you of some of the individual elements which have come together and catalysed seismic change in our time. And laterally, into that shifting ground have come the implosion of the global recession and the current challenges facing the Roman Catholic Church.

We are dizzy, disturbed and dis-eased. Like the Psalmist in Psalm 17 we might say:

The waves of death rise about us,

The torrents of destruction assail us

*The snares of the grave entangle us
The traps of death encompass us
Then the earth reeled and rocked
The mountains were shaken to their base
They reeled at his terrible anger
He lowered the heavens and came down
A black cloud under his feet
He made the darkness his covering
The dark waters of the clouds his tent*

In that latter verse is there a clue about the action of God among us? Could this demise, destruction, and death be somehow part of God's plan? As Rev. Bryan Massingale states, 'Things are ending. And the prophet dares to proclaim that this demise is aided and abetted by God's own self'.⁴ Many commentators within and outside our Great Tradition are keen to stress that the current woes and trouble are the inevitable consequence of some outside force or sin like moral relativism or secularism or a general dilution of the faith of the people. It is much more challenging and honest, I would respectfully suggest, to consider that all that has now come to pass indeed involves the action of God among us, 'See I am doing a new thing among you' (Is.43:19). We will not be able to see that new thing if we do not believe that God is using this darkness as his cover, if we cannot be at ease with the idea that God's tent is hidden in the cloud of dark waters. Equally it is more challenging and honest to see and confess our individual and collective involvement in and responsibility for creating the kind of world that is now being laid waste. And perhaps most challenging of all are these words, again from Isaiah

*The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue
So that I might know how to reply to the wearied
He provides me with speech
Each morning he wakes me to hear,
To listen like a disciple
The Lord has opened my ear. (50:4)*

For, I believe, we are being deeply challenged as disciples to be prophetic, to both openly acknowledge and mourn the passing of the old whilst simultaneously becoming involved in birthing the new.

One of the biblical figures who has insistently been part of my musings in preparation for this presentation has been Nicodemus. A contemporary of Jesus, I think of his social and religious role as being somewhat akin to your own – resourced with the prestige and power of a particular religious tradition albeit in political and cultural situations less than sympathetic at times. I think of his coming to Jesus under cover of darkness because of his intuitive recognition of ‘the new thing’ perhaps being incarnated in the life and message of this man of Nazareth⁵. And although attracted by Jesus words and actions, -‘No one could do what you do if they had not come from God’-, Nicodemus found Jesus’ vision and wisdom deeply challenging and confounding – ‘But how can a grown man return to the womb of his mother to be born again?’ he protested. He is faced with the complete transformation required by Jesus of those who wish to *see*, not to mention *enter* the kingdom of which he speaks. For Nicodemus, the Pharisee, this radical demand means going back to make a new beginning. It means unlearning all the sacred assumptions from yesterday. It means letting go all the cosy protections and even busy schedules for projects and religious duties. It means letting go of concern with the externals of holiness and instead being prepared to undergo complete metanoia.

When I think of the future of consecrated life in Europe I think it will involve for you men, a leap of faith and allegiance as radical, as dramatic and as demanding as that required of Nicodemus. You may first have to do it ‘under cover of darkness’. Initially, you may have to hold your fire for a time – as Nicodemus did, when despite his initial reticence, he spoke prophetically against injustice when the Pharisees were involved in an early attempt to arrest Jesus⁶. But there will come a time, very shortly afterwards, when you will have to do much more. You may have to help others to bury ‘the dead’ in decent burial grounds, including buying the expensive nard and spices and finally rolling over the giant stone. You may have to consent to letting die that which needs to die, so that God’s ‘new thing’ may have the space and sustenance to emerge. And then?... Then you must witness to the Resurrection, support the new flourishing of work for the kingdom, support the uneducated but committed with the skills and resources to make manifest glimpses of the kingdom.

You will no longer be a part of the ‘Sanhedrin’ – you will have had to divest yourselves of religious prestige. There may be leaders of Christian groups and communities that you are part of or visiting who will not be as well educated in scripture and tradition as you. But they

will have been witnesses to the ‘new thing that God is doing among us’ and their fire and passion and capacity for healing will be acknowledged and confirmed by you as gifted by the Spirit.

As you know the Greek word which we translate as ‘disciple’ was ‘*manthano*’ – and so conveys in its roots the concept of being a ‘learner with others’. The challenge of those who are to live consecrated life as disciples in the future will I believe be, first and foremost, to retrieve that ancient meaning and become *learners-with-others*.

Returning to Massingale who says ..

*‘a new Church is coming. It will be browner and poorer, more sensuous and feminine, less clerical and more collegial, less concerned about charity and more conscious of justice and more multilingual and polycentric than the one we know now. ...It will be a new Church yet it can only come with the passing of this one’.*⁷

I believe the death of one and the midwifing of the other will be the business of those consecrating their lives to God. Not everything in our tradition needs to die or must die. Far from it! But each of us, as committed disciples, as co-learners, must peel away all that is inessential. We must return to the roots of the message and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the core ritual of breaking bread and sharing the cup. This will take place in faith communities that witness to life, healing, truth, reconciliation, justice, and profound respect for and action on behalf of the least, the little ones and the lost. Such witness will involve us again in challenging prophetically the political, economic and sometimes social status quo and the short-sighted destruction of our one earth - the interconnected life system which sustains all life as we know it. Therefore we will no doubt once again all find ourselves relegated to the margins, being called on to take up our cross, to be *for* the kingdom and *for* the poor and the oppressed – for that is where our founder chose to locate himself. This is a huge challenge for all of us – religious and lay- and enthusiastic as we lay people may be, we cannot respond to this challenge on our own. We need your help, encouragement and mentoring. Is it possible for me to mention some of the ways I think we lay people would be looking to you for example and guidance?

As one Irish theologian puts it⁸:

‘Jesus of Nazareth called disciples to incarnate the vision of the kingdom in a permanent way of life which would make credible the dream that God has for the world. He asks them to live in service

to the humanity of others so that the roots of oppression – the pathologies of the heart, the hungers for power, prestige and possession would be overcome’. ...He wants them to ‘be together in such a way so that there would be no discrimination, no sectarianism, no indifference to the suffering of others, no fatalism in their minds or imaginations before the flawed structures of family, society, church and community’.

Because we are so acutely conscious of just how flawed these structures may be, I believe lay people feel called to a new, critical awareness today of just how easily organisations and institutions can deviate from their foundational vision and begin to achieve perverted effects, while retaining the honourable vocabulary of their origins. They will need to test the credibility and consistency of any group that claims to incarnate the vision of Jesus in its life and praxis. They will be searching for those genuinely living in continuity with that foundational vision. They will be listening for the prophetic voice, which, even in situations of shame and fear, is prepared to speak out on behalf of those whose humanity is being trampled in the world. Timothy Radcliffe’s description of the post-resurrection community is apt here:

‘The Resurrection was made visible to the world in the astonishing sight of a community reborn. These cowards and deniers were gathered together again. They... were shamefaced at what they had done, but once again they were one. The unity of the Church is a sign that all the forces that fragment and scatter are defeated in Christ’⁹.

Some of what I believe Lay People are seeking may be already present in the communities that you represent but I think that they may approach you hoping to find certain priorities and different emphases including:

1. A renewed emphasis on *being* rather than *doing*: This may sound clichéd but I believe it is important to listen to what is implied in this distinction. We lay people have noted the dramatic increase in the amount of activity engaged in by most Religious Congregations, despite depletion in numbers and increased age profile. Indeed Albert Nolan, in his most recent book makes the disturbing suggestion that ‘busyness’ is one of the great sins of our time¹⁰. So I would go so far as to suggest ‘Ease out of all projects ‘! Instead choose to inhabit fully and live completely the essence of your distinctive charisms – and obviously these will all be variations on aspects of the foundational Christian community I referred to above. Just to take an example from

my own experience of working with the Oblates in the Anglo-Irish Province. The Oblates can readily name off the prominent elements of their charism and while all of them are true and valid what struck me most is one that is rarely mentioned formally. That is their extraordinary ability to offer hospitality to the visitor, friend, outsider, marginalised, refugee. My own suggestion to them, for example, would be to capitalise on that facility which is certainly part of their charism and is something that Lay People desire and would benefit from in the anonymity of modern living.

I believe we must take seriously Karl Rahner's prophesy about the Christian of the future when he says- 'The devout Christian of the future will either be a mystic...or he will cease to be anything at all'. Thomas Merton in his poem 'In Silence'¹¹ catches exactly what I am trying to say:

Be still...

Do not think of what you are

Still less of what you may one day be

Rather

Be what you are...

O be still, while

You are still alive.

And all things live around you

Speaking

To your own being

Speaking by the Unknown

That is in you and in themselves

2. A commitment to non-patriarchal, non-authoritarian and non-racist ways of organising people and activity. Before I elaborate on this I want to compliment you on inviting myself and Ana to address you these days. I don't want to underestimate the significance of that decision and I know that it is probably boring at this stage, (as a good friend put it to me recently), to be still raising the question about the radical re-thinking required in relation to the role of women in the Catholic Church. In general given the global and local networks of most Religious Congregations, founded in Europe, you have an extraordinary opportunity to model the kind of inclusivity required of those who believe that all are equal in the sight of God. Such modelling

would in itself be the most powerful social comment of all, on discriminatory, exclusive and racist practices. We lay people feel a pressing need to not only know that such inclusivity as this is theoretically possible but that it is actually happening in a credible way and that it would be possible for us to be part of it.

3. A recognition of just how powerfully counter-cultural is the choice of living in community. In this European culture with a such a strong individualistic inclination— (statistics from the UK recently stated that over 50% of adults live alone; the Irish figure is closer to 35 % but growing with every census) the choice of women or men to live together, as the Oblates in the Anglo Irish Province put it – ‘sharing life, faith and mission’ is a starkly counter-cultural choice¹². After the Vatican Council the emphasis on community to seemed expressed itself in improving interpersonal relationship. And while this was of value, perhaps there was a loss of necessary emphasis on *relatedness* to a shared commitment to a particular mission and vision. Such a relatedness model de-centers attention away from pre-occupation with one another’s foibles, instead fosters a new *communitas* of equals and maintains the focus always on the kingdom, which Pope Paul VI described as ‘the only absolute’¹³.

What makes this living choice both more challenging and perhaps more attractive is the model it also provides of the opportunity to live more simply. It headlines in a practical way the linking of the minute-to-minute decisions and choices about food, clothing, waste, transport, property, staff, resources to a stated commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Many of you have done enormous work in this area and the citizens of Europe have much to learn in this regard about the practicalities of sustainable living. We need people like you to speak to us, inspire and persuade us about earth as our mother and humanity as a crucial incarnational element of the ecosystem. But we especially need to see such sustainable, simple and just living implemented in a daily, practicable lifestyle.

4. Your leadership role as committed religious in critical theological reflection. Speaking with friends recently we acknowledged that, theoretically at least, theological reflection will continue in university settings etc. But each of us voiced our concern that critical theological reflection would be more available and accessible than that. It is already a source of disillusionment for us as Irish Catholics that no ecclesial comment or contribution has been made on the vexed theological questions of our time in Ireland because of the negative backlash

stemming from the sexual and physical abuse scandals of the past fifteen years. We believe that lay people deserve the very best theology possible. We equally believe they deserve the very best theological education available. Such theological education should not be the reserve of those who commit to a consecrated life. Religious Congregations of Europe could take up an even stronger leadership role in encouraging and supporting that kind of theological education among lay people, not a diluted pastoral version but rather a complete, rigorous and critical one.

5. To create open spaces for ritual and reflection. There is a deep hunger among many people for quiet tranquil restorative time and space in which they can slow down, reassess their priorities, find sanctuary and healing and return renewed and refreshed to the rhythm of their daily lives. In these times Religious as well as lay people are constantly being bombarded by stimulation from various media, which no doubt affects our health and our sanity. We need open and sacred spaces for ritual and communion which acknowledge both the dignity and equality of every person and creature upon the earth, and God as the source and summit of all that is. Some of you are already offering such sanctuary but I believe there is a crying need for more such centres and more widespread access to them. However, I believe it would be important that such spaces would not simply offer set programmes but in the future would be released from the tight control of singular spiritualities.

6. To engage easily and enthusiastically in inter-faith dialogue: I am not thinking here of ecumenical dialogue although I recognise and respect the tireless work of many in that arena. Lay People are daily challenged by the multi-faith context of their work and leisure spaces. Added to the respect and dignity they have for the difference represented there, I believe many of us would desire to become more adept at speaking confidently about their own tradition. Secondly we would wish to bring that confidence into open and respectful dialogue with the teachings and traditions of other faiths. The Great Wisdom Traditions of the World are such an extraordinary resource for humanity and I believe again that Religious Congregations of Europe are particularly well placed to model an ease and enthusiasm for an on-going and animated exchange of truth and wisdom between these great traditions. Recent books by the Dominican, Brian J. Pierre and the Franciscan, Richard Rohr ¹⁴are like written examples of the kind of social and intellectual engagement at the face-to-face level that I would suggest

will be more and more sought after.

By way of conclusion I return to the gospel imperative to all disciples to be salt of the earth and light of the world. Part of the difficulty may be that we have heard these phrases so often that we are no longer fully attentive to their radical challenge. For to be salt and light for earth and world we must first love the earth and love the world – we must become people who cannot but exclaim that ‘the world is charged with the grandeur of God,... flaming out, shining like shook foil’¹⁵. Because of the vocational choices Religious make in relation to that Gospel injunction, we Lay People will naturally look to you for exemplification of its truth.

¹ These investigations are called the Ryan and Murphy Reports, surnames of the leading judges.

² After Yeats, W.B., *The Second Coming*

³ Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland Easter 2010 www.vatican.va

⁴ Bryan Massingale, ‘*See I Am Doing Something New!*’ *Prophetic Ministry for a Church in Transition* 20th Assembly of Priests in Milwaukee, 2004, pg. 4

⁵ John 3

⁶ John 7

⁷ Massingale, 2004 As above, pg. 6.

⁸ Bredin, Eamonn, *Praxis and Praise*, Columba Press 1994, p. 190.

⁹ The Tablet April 10, 2010 Issue

¹⁰ Nolan, Albert *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* Albert Nolan: Orbis Books (USA), 2006.

¹¹ From ‘*The Strange Islands*’ – Poems by Thomas Merton

¹² Obaltes of the Anglo Irish Province Mission Statement, www.obaltesai.org

¹³ Evangelii Nuntiandi

¹⁴ Pierce, B.J., *We walk the Path Together*, Learning from the thich Nhat Hanh & Meister Eckhart Orbis Books 2006 and Rohr, R. *The Naked Now*, Learning to See as the Mystics See Crossroad Publishing 2009

¹⁵ After Hopkins, G.M. *God’s Grandeur* Poem No. 7, 1918