JESUS TRANSFIGURED:
HIS FACE LAUNCHES US ON A JOURNEY

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In this Bulletin we wish to share the riches of the UISG Council of Delegates which was concluded at the start of December 2011 in Aparecida, Brazil.

The UISG, which represents almost two thousand General Superiors all over the world, aside from having its central and animating office in Rome, is made up of small groups, national or regional which are called “Constellations”, coordinated by delegates who, together with their equipe try to create occasions for sharing among the General Superiors of their corresponding geographic zones.

Every year and a half, the Executive Board, with its office in Rome, convokes a Council made up of the Delegates of the Constellations. These meetings are held alternately in Rome and in other parts of the world. This time, the Council of Delegates was held in Brazil. We may ask why?

The past Councils were held in India, Poland, Kenya and this time therefore, it is the turn of Latin America! We have chosen Brazil because we wanted to meet with a prophetic religious life and because the Conference of Religious of Brazil has accepted our proposal with open arms. It was suggested to us to hold the meeting in the Marian city of Aparecida, center of the popular religiosity towards “Nossa Senhora”.

In this issue, we offer the theological reflection presented during the Council of Delegates, by the Brazilian theologians Sr. Vera Bombonatto, FSP and Sr. Lucia Weiler, IDP who, in perfect harmony, presented the theme “Jesus transfigured: His face launches us on a journey”. Following the methodology of “See, Judge, Act”, they started off with the reality of the many disfigured features of the people and of the religious life and in that light, they offered a biblical exegesis of the text. The transfigured face of Jesus “launches religious life on a journey” that it may renew its being, its life and the reality that surrounds it.

Br. Paulo Petry, FSC, during the day of the Council which was open to the Religious of Brazil, presented his vision of “The Consecrated Life in Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges and hopes” drawing from his deep knowledge of the Latin American continent as the CLAR President. He presented strong challenges, of violence above all, which unfortunately occupies the first place and hopes full of life that manifest a prophetic religious life in the Latin American society.
Even if we cannot publish the complete text of the North American theologian Sr. Sandra Schneiders, IHM on the “Prophetic future ahead for women religious”, we offer you its published synthesis. Considering with serenity the reality of the Religious Life in the western hemisphere did not hold back the author in seeing the new signs of life which are springing out from within and, starting from these, she finds courage to dream of a different future, a new form of presence of the feminine religious life.

In the section Life Experiences we bring to you the experience of an Intercongregational Community of the CRB in Haiti. This was presented during the Council of Delegates in Aparecida by Sr. Marian Ambrosio, President of the Conference of Religious of Brazil (CRB). The suffering of the people has greatly touched them, united them and impelled them to give an alternative response.
JESUS TRANSFIGURED: HIS FACE LAUNCHES US ON A JOURNEY
“RISE UP, DO NOT BE AFRAID” (MT 17,7)

Sr. Vera Ivanise Bombonatto, FSP
Sr. Lucia Weiler IDP

Sr. Vera Ivanise Bombonatto belongs to the Congregation of the Pauline Sisters. She is a Doctor of Theology, professor of Christology, head of Theology Department and a member of the Dogmatic of the Pauline publications. She participates in the Team for Theological Reflection of the Conference of Religious of Brazil and CLAR. She is a member of the Society of Theology and Religious Studies.

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Original in Portuguese

INTRODUCTION

We are gathered in the name of the Trinity: the Father who calls us to follow Jesus and who assures us that He is the beloved Son (cf. Mt 17.5), the Son who is the Way, the Truth and the Life of humanity (cf. Jn 14,6), the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength and who forms us in the image of the Son (cf. Gal 4, 19).

We are welcome, with joy and love, in this city of Aparecida, symbol of the dynamic and transforming faith of the Brazilian people, a blessed place that invites us to reflect on the presence of Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, in the history of salvation, and of many unknown consecrated women who have given their lives to the cause of Jesus.

Our reflection these days will unfold from a central episode in the life and ministry of Jesus, narrated in the Synoptic Gospels: The Transfiguration of Jesus.

We will follow the method of “SEE, JUDGE, ACT”, developing the following points:

I In search for a transfigured face (SEE)
II In search of the light for the necessary passage from disfigurement to transfiguration (JUDGE)

III In search of new ways of following Christ (ACT)

I IN SEARCH FOR A TRANFIGURED FACE (SEE)

This first stage of our reflection aims to situate us in the mystical, prophetic and sapiential paradigmatic event of the Transfiguration. Through this event, we want to make our hearts aware of the reality of the many disfigured faces of our people who long for transfiguration and at the same time perceive the real situation of our Consecrated Life today: its challenges and its hopes, its fears and its joys. Initially, we want to revisit the biblical text, re-reading this episode in the gospel of Matthew 17, 1 – 8.

1. Reasons for the choice of this gospel passage as paradigmatic text and icon of this journey

Why did we choose this passage from the life and ministry of Jesus for our reflection these days? What is the relationship between Jesus and the transfiguration of Consecrated Religious Life? What are the lights, the strengths and the provocations of the Transfiguration of Jesus for Consecrated Religious Life today? What is the relationship between the Transfiguration of Jesus and the manifestation of God in the apparition of the Virgin Mary in the waters of the river Parnaiba?

We can enumerate 4 reasons which justify our choice:

1.1 - Transfiguration: the revelation-event of the Trinitarian Mystery

The first reason for the choice of this text is, without doubt, its Christological and Trinitarian relevance and importance, which is also the heart of Religious Life. The scene of the Transfiguration of Jesus is at the heart of the New Testament Christology and the revelation of the Trinity (as we shall later see better in the second part of our reflection – the time of Judging).

This experience is recounted in the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. Each evangelist gave this event its human colour, depending on the context, audience, communities of interlocutors and the purpose of their Gospel.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is the prelude to His painful death on the Cross and the anticipation of His glorious resurrection. It has a twofold objective: to strengthen the faith of the disciples and prepare them to live the drama of the Cross and at the same time, confirm them in the certainty of the divine filiation of Jesus, through His resurrection.
This is a revelation-event of the mystery of the Trinity: the Father’s voice reveals the identity of Jesus: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” Jesus reveals His divinity. The Holy Spirit represented in the luminous cloud enfolded Jesus.

In the mystery of the Transfiguration, we also have a glimpse of our sublime vocation: “God has saved us and has called us to a holy vocation, not according to our works, but according to His purpose and His grace; grace which has been given us in Christ Jesus before the ages begun but has only now been revealed by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ who abolished death and has caused life and immortality to radiate through the Gospel” (2Tim 1, 9 – 10).

The transfigured One on Mount Tabor is disfigured on the Cross and helps us to recognize the disfigured faces of so many brothers and sisters, the poor and the suffering seeking justice and peace. It also helps us to see the disfigured face of the planet designed with so much love by the Creator, “and God saw that it was very good” (cf. Gen 1, 1- 2, 4ª) and destroyed by the thirst for profit and power.

With this reflection, we want to be attuned with the universal Church, in the process of transfiguration. We also want to remember the many religious men and women who gave their lives, with love and much sacrifice in the reflection and teaching of Theology.

1.2 Transfiguration: icon of the Consecrated Life

The second reason for which we have chosen this text is its significance for Consecrated Religious Life. The post synodal Exhortation Vita Consecrata unfolds around the icon of the Transfiguration of Jesus. This episode embraces, in a single vision, the essential traits of Consecrated Life particularly the contemplative dimension in reference to the prayer of Jesus on the mountain and the active dimension, which reveals the glory of Jesus and prepares Him to face the tragedy of the Cross.¹

According to this document, the contemplation of the transfigured face of Jesus revealed to the consecrated persons the mystery of the Trinity: the Father, creator and giver of all good who proclaims: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him” (Mt 17,5). Moved by His gratuituous love, He took the initiative to call; the Son, “the image of the invisible God” (cf Col 1, 15), the way that leads to the Father, who invites those whom the Father has called to follow Him; the Holy Spirit who consecrates and sends, eliciting a wholehearted response.²

With this reflection, we would like to be attuned to all religious men and women throughout the world, in their everyday endeavor to be, among their
people, “The transfigured face of the beloved Son”.

1.3 Transfiguration: the inspiring vision and goal of Latin American Religious Life

The third reason for which we have chosen this scene for our reflection is its relevance to the Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean. The inspiring vision of the Global Plan of CLAR (2009 – 2012) assumes two biblical icons which motivate and illuminate its journey: the meeting of Jesus with the Syro-phoenician woman (Mk 7, 24-30) and the experience of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mk 9, 2-10).

Faced with the challenges of the new scenarios that comprise the socio-economic, political, cultural, religious and ecclesial context and the emerging concerns, the Religious Life in Latin America disposes itself to listen to the historical reality and to the “beloved Son of the Father” (Mt 17,5), having as objective, the new features of religious life.

Therefore, this reflection wishes to be, in a particular manner, attuned with the Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean, in their endeavors to be recognized in “Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father”, follow His footsteps and take on His project, listening to God there where life calls.

1.4 Transfiguration: The Virgin of Aparecida, symbol of God’s compassion

The fourth reason for this choice of the Transfiguration is linked to the site which has been chosen to host this meeting: the Marian city of Aparecida, the center of faith and the place that has given rise to numerous transfigurations; broken and traumatized bodies that, in the shadow of this small image of the Virgin, were restored and transfigured, miraculously.

Mary of Nazareth, the humble handmaid of the Lord, “appeared” to three simple fishermen. The small image which was found in the water has its head separated from the body with the color of the most despised race: black. The Virgin is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and has become the symbol of disfigured faces and of many people in need. Anonymous people started the cult and spread this devotion. The first person who received a miracle was a slave. The Virgin is the Mother of the people and companion in their journey towards the fullness of life.

In the consciousness of the suffering people invoking her in a variety of names, She is the Mother of Jesus who has gone through a history of suffering. She gave birth to her Son Jesus in poverty and simplicity, fled into Egypt to save her Son, and remained with Jesus at the foot of the Cross. She rose to heaven but remains close to the suffering humanity. Her constant
presence in the universe is found within the Passion of Jesus, as the Mother of compassion who greatly intercedes before God for the humble and the oppressed.

The fisherman, a man among his people, who brought the disfigured image in his house in a gesture of love and gratitude, restored it, joining the head to the body with wax from the bees of Arapuá. This image of Mary was restored and reassembled in its human form through the dynamism and creativity of the oppressed culture. Restoring the image-symbol, the devoted people have rebuilt the meaning of the image.

In its fragility, this small image reveals the compassion of a small God and the small people facing big problems and the dangers of everyday life, find comfort and strength to continue their struggle for survival.

This reflection on the Transfiguration of Jesus brings us closer to the lacerated bodies of our suffering people, transfigured in their faith and through the intercession of the Virgin Mary who tells us: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2,5). We also get closer to the reality of Religious Life today wherein many disfigured bodies of religious men and women are yearning for a transfigured new life.

2. The cry of the disfigured faces of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean

The option for the disfigured faces of the people is one of the characteristics of the Latin American Church, it is our way of being Christians and consecrated. This option “is implicit in the Christological faith in a God who became poor for us in order to enrich us with His poverty (cf. 2 Cor, 8-9)”.

In Medellin, the Church has heard the deafening cry of millions of men and women asking their pastors for liberation which they do not receive anywhere else, and made a clear and prophetic preferential option for and solidarity with the poor.

Puebla urged all Christians to recognize in the face of the poor, the “traits of the suffering Christ, the Lord who questions us and asks us” and presents a list of these features of the poor and the least in whom we are called to recognize the disfigured face of Jesus Christ: the abandoned children, disoriented youth, exploited indigenous people and campesinos, underpaid workers, the underemployed and unemployed, the elderly and the marginalized.

Santo Domingo affirms that “to discover in the suffering faces of the poor the face of Jesus (cf. Mt 25,31-46) is something that challenges all Christians to a deeper personal and ecclesial conversion”.

Aparecida reaffirmed that “this option comes from our faith in Jesus
Christ, the God made man, who became our brother (cf. Heb 2, 11-12)” and acknowledged that globalization has caused the emergence in our people, of new faces of poverty: migrants, victims of violence, displaced people, refugees, victims of human trafficking and kidnapping, victims of involuntary disappearance (desaparecidos), victims of AIDS and endemic diseases, drug addicts, the elderly, victims of child-prostitution, battered women, victims of sex trafficking, the disabled, the unemployed, the marginalized because of technological illiteracy, street people in big cities, indigenous people, the Afro-Americans, the landless farmers and miners.

The Consecrated Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean, walks together with these disfigured faces, defending life wherever it is threatened, in order to carry on this cause which is the concern of Jesus, “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12, 1), who gave their lives up to the point of martyrdom, like Sr. Dorothy Stang. And this struggle continues!

Who are disfiguring this long list of faces? God transfigures us as He transfigured Jesus, because we are His beloved sons and daughters.

Suggestions for group dynamics:
1. In small groups, identify:
   - the expressions of disfigured faces of our people and the signs of transfiguration
   - the expressions of disfigured faces of religious life and the signs of transfiguration
2. Plenary with creative sharing
3. Synthesis: MAPPING OUT
   - Disfigured faces desirous of transfiguration: a) our people b) Religious life
   - Signs of transfiguration: a) our people b) Religious life

II. IN SEARCH OF THE LIGHT NEEDED TO CROSS OVER: THE TRANSITION FROM DISFIGUREMENT TO TRANSFIGURATION (JUDGE)

After explaining the reasons that led us to reflect on the event of the Transfiguration and after considering the current reality of the disfigured faces of our people and that of Religious Life yearning for transfiguration, let us go to the second moment of our reflection: the illumination of this reality through the Word of God.

Methodologically, we will contemplate more closely the first story from Mark, making some considerations about the details recounted in Matthew and Luke. We will also look at other Bible passages, as reference books,
especially John, the first Letter to the Corinthians and the Second Letter of Peter. The main objective and principal horizon of our research is to find light for the journey of Consecrated Religious Life in this historical moment, as called to undertake the transition from the Paschal disfigurement to the Transfiguration.

1. A biblico-exegetical-hermeneutical reflection

The Synod on the Word of God invites us to contemplate the Word as Face.

The Son of God is the Word, is the Logos, the Eternal Word (cf. Gn 1,1 ff). This Word became small, small enough to fit in a manger. He became a child so that the Word could be grasped by all of us. Now, this Word is not only audible, it does not only have a voice, but now the Word has a face which we can all see: Jesus of Nazareth (Verbum Domini n. 12). It is the transfigured face of Jesus that creates for us an opening and endless possibilities of transformation that is still to come. We are constantly in the process of becoming.

Because of this, we are now invited to focus our attention mainly on the biblical history.

1.1 Etymology and origin of the word ‘transfiguration’ and its biblico-theological meaning

The term ‘transfiguration’ is the translation of a greek word: ἀλογοσοῦ. We can find the idea of transformation of divine and human beings in Greek and Roman mythology. Through Hellenistic and Roman legends, we have come to know about a series of legends on transformations (Nikandros, P. Ovidius Naso). But the concept of metamorphosis belongs to the essence of the “mysteries” of late antiquity.

In the Bible the term appears only four times in the New Testament: Mk 9, 2; Mt 17,2; Rom 12,2; 2 Cor 3,18. And in these four cases, it is found only in the passive voice μεταμόρφομαι. 8

Luke recounts the story of the Transfiguration, but does not mention the term μεταμόρφοσε (cf. Lk 9,28-36). Even in the letter of Peter (2 Pt 1, 1-21) we find an account of this experience re-read as word of farewell and attributed to Peter himself.

Morphe, translated as transfigured and transformed, can have various biblical meanings:

a) An externally visible transformation (Mt 17,2; Mk 9,2): In their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as
white as the light (Mt 17,2); There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. (Mk 9,2b.3). Luke narrates the event (Lk 9, 28-36), but does not use the term transfiguration: As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning (Lk 9, 29). This does not deal with a transformation of the essence of Jesus. In the transfiguration, the true essence of Jesus is revealed to the three chosen and predilected disciples: Peter, James and John. The verb metamorfoomai refers to a divine action.

b) Transfiguration can be understood as opposed to the attitude of conformity or compliance with this world (αιϖν). Rm 12, 2 proposes the Christian need for a change of mentality, meaning metanoia, conversion, a change of life. According to Paul, this is the true worship pleasing to God: “Think of God’s mercy my brothers and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God. Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do” (Rm 12,1-2).

c) In 2 Cor 3,18, we find a clear allusion to the transforming power of the Kyrios that is, the pneuma (πνευµα). And we, with our unveiled faces, reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.

The objective of the action of the Spirit is transfiguration until we become the image of the glorified Christ, the exalted Christ. The face to face vision, with faces unveiled, of the glorious Lord, that is of our God, that is given to us by the Spirit makes us become similar to Him whom we contemplate. This is a dynamic process, from the glorification of God to the superabundance of His doxa on all Christians, who are so transformed to His own image and likeness.

The content (not the word) is also found in the idea of transformation in 1Cor 15, 35ff. Here we find the assurance that in the fulfillment of salvation, in the resurrection, everyone will have the same new way of being: the new life. This calls to mind how fleeting human nature is, comparable to the corruptible seed that, dying, will rise again, or transform itself to an incorruptible seed. This ephemeral, mortal and corruptible body must disappear in order to reappear in a new form (1Cor 15,53), following the example of Christ, first born of many brothers (Rm 8,29). The continuity of human existence is pure grace of God, in the discontinuity of the new eschatological creation (cf. 1
Cor 15, 36.42). In the apocalyptic horizon, there is the promise of a new future, a complete, substantial, qualitative transformation towards a new creation.

d) In the second letter of Peter the theological meaning puts in evidence the experiential character. The metaphor of the Tent, dwelling place of God in our midst (Jn 1, 14) also becomes the metaphor of the human body of Peter. Little by little, the meaning of metamorphosis – translated as Transfiguration – acquires a deeper theological interpellation:

a) a divine revelation of the glorification of the earthly Jesus and His manifestation in anticipated glory, to His disciples and, through its narration also to us, readers of the Gospel.

b) a process of transfiguration which takes place in the Christians through faith and the recognition of the glorified and exalted Lord. This recognition involves the progressive configuration to the image of Jesus Christ and, consequently, a free and conscious surrender to the will of God which must also pass through the Cross and death. Transfiguration thus, takes on the character of a witness and a martyr. 

1.2 The event of the Transfiguration in the Synoptic Gospels

The Transfiguration is recounted in the three synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. This is a sign that such episode contains an important message for the first communities. It is envisaged to be a help to overcome the crisis which the Cross and the suffering have caused in the disciples. Also today, the Transfiguration continues to be a help to overcome the crisis provoked by the Cross and suffering. The three sleepy disciples could very well mirror all of us. The voice of the Father speaks to them and to us saying: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!”

It is important to note that, from a literary and thematic point of view, the story of the Transfiguration in the three synoptic Gospels is placed immediately after the first announcement of the Passion. This is significant because it indicates the imminence of the passion of Jesus. Jesus was already in conflict with the authority many times. Within that community, the proclamation of the Kingdom, in the way Jesus was doing, was not tolerated. He should either turn back or die! There was no alternative. And Jesus did not turn back. It was for this reason that the Cross appears on the horizons not as a possibility but as a certainty. Together with the Cross is the temptation to follow the way of the Glorious Messiah and not the path of the Crucified Servant.

Let us make a synopsis of the three stories as they appear in the three Synoptic Gospels. Let us observe the details and the particularities of each
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gospel and let us allow them to touch us.

### Synoptic Scheme of the Transfiguration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mt 17, 1-9</th>
<th>Mk 9, 2-10</th>
<th>Lk 9, 28-36</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 and after six days, and his clothes became as white as the light.</td>
<td>2 Six days after, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothing became dazzling white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them.</td>
<td>28 about eight days after this had been said, He took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain.</td>
<td>Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him.</td>
<td>Suddenly Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then Peter spoke to Jesus: Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.</td>
<td>“Rabbi”, he said “it is wonderful for us to be here”; “so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Synoptic Scheme of the Transfiguration**

29 As he prayed,

2 There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them.

3 Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; and they were talking with Jesus.

30 Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah, appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.

32 Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

33 As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus: “Master, it is wonderful for us to be here”; So let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”.

33 As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus: “Master, it is wonderful for us to be here”; So let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”. 
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>English Text</th>
<th>Greek Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>He did not know what to say; they were so frightened.</td>
<td>Στην Λείψανον του Χριστού, εγκατάστασεν αυτούς σε μια δράμα που ήταν τόσο καταστροφικό.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow,</td>
<td>Τον Χριστό να είναι έτοιμος να περάσει μέσω της ενότητας της στιγμής της συνεδρίας των διδάκτων.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and from the cloud there came a voice which said:</td>
<td>και ένα σύννεφο έφτασε, κατακατείχαν τους με τη σκιά, και κινήθηκε έναν ήχο από το σύννεφο που είπε:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid.</td>
<td>Και όταν αποκλείτηκαν στο σύννεφο, οι μαθητές τους έφεραν την σκιά.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear.</td>
<td>Η διαδοχή της ακοής έπληξε τους μαθητές τους και εκατέρωθεν με φόβο.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>But Jesus came up and touched them. “Rise up”, he said, “do not be afraid!”</td>
<td>Τότε ο Χριστός άρχισε να τους επισκεφτεί και τους καλεί να αναθρησκευτούν.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus.</td>
<td>Και, όταν άνοιξαν τα μάτια τους, δεν είδαν κανέναν άλλον από τον Χριστό.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order:</td>
<td>Και όταν άφησαν το βουνό, ο Χριστός τους έκανε να πείσουν:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>And a voice came from the cloud saying,</td>
<td>ένας ήχος έφτασε από το σύννεφο που είπε:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Then suddenly, when they looked around they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus.</td>
<td>Και έξω άφησαν, όταν άνοιξαν τα μάτια τους, δεν είδαν κανέναν άλλον από τον Χριστό.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>As they came down from the mountain he warned them</td>
<td>Και όταν άφησαν το βουνό, ο Χριστός τους έκανε να πείσουν:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>And after the voice had spoken,</td>
<td>άκολουθησε ο ήχος και ο Χριστός μείνε πάνω και δέχτηκε τον φόβο των:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what “rising from the dead” could mean.</td>
<td>Οι μαθητές παρακολούθησαν την προφητεία με σεβασμό, ακόμη και μεταξύ τους συζήτησαν ποια σημασία έχει το “φθορά ζωής“</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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and which eventually took on the narrative-literary style of evangelical scriptures.

1.3 Understanding the Transfiguration in times of crisis, of the dark night, with the Cross as Vision (Mk 9,2-8)

This story of the Transfiguration, in its content and structure, has its origin in the Gospel of Mark. In the overall structure of Mark’s Gospel, the Transfiguration account is a highlight that, in the first part corresponds to the scene of the baptism (Mk 1, 9 – 11). Here also, the divine voice proclaims Jesus: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!” (Mk 9,7b). 11

a) A look at the context

The Gospel of Mark was written at the height of the crisis of Galilee, on the verge of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, which actually took place in the year 70. It is a Gospel which tells of Jesus as a man who is in conflict with the freedom of the Son of God. It is for this reason that Mark started by proclaiming: The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk 1, 1). And at the end, we find the profession of faith of the centurion: “Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, ‘In truth, this man was Son of God!’” (Mk, 37 – 39)

The underlying theme of the Gospel is the Messianic Secret, which rightly aims to reveal and hide the true messianism of the Servant and not the triumphalistic messianism of the King. The key to an interpretation of the Messianic Secret is found in the final verse of the Transfiguration account (Mk 9, 9-10): “As they came down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what rising from the dead could mean.”

The setting of this text of the Transfiguration consists in the two stories of the blind men. At first we have the blind man of Bethsaida, who is anonymous (Mk 8, 22-26), followed by Peter’s profession of faith (Mk 8, 27-30). In both stories, Jesus recommends the messianic secret. In the middle, we find the three progressive announcements of the passion, death and resurrection, followed by a call to follow Jesus (Mk 8, 34-38).

As a final episode, we find an instruction on service, in which the Son of Man is presented as the model (Mk 10, 42-45), which concluded with the scene of the blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10, 46 – 52). With the confirmation: Jesus said to him, “Go, your faith has saved you”. And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road...(Mk 10,52).
At the center of this context we find the text of the Transfiguration introduced by an affirmation: And he said to them, “I tell you solemnly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power” (Mk 9, 1).

The text culminates with the key interpretation of the messianic secret, that is, the death and resurrection of Jesus, that follows the debate on the meaning of resurrection and the coming of Elijah. (Mk 10, 9 – 13).

b) Notice and re-create the meaning of the text and Word of God for us, yesterday and today

Mk 9,2: Six days after, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured.

The scenario is created using a chronological time which is symbolic: “Six days after”. Based on the information from the Gospel, we may not understand to what chronological event this text refers. Thus, it is presumed that we are dealing with a symbolic number or a reference to something which is not yet completed but is about to happen. According to a hypothesis, it is six days after Peter’s profession of faith. In Mark 7 we find the episode of the Syro-phoenician woman asking for the crumbs of the children and was commended by Jesus. At the end of this same chapter we find a beautiful conclusion: “Their admiration was unbounded. He has done all things well, they said, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.” (Mk 7,37).

Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. The mountain evokes Mount Sinai, where, in the past, God manifested His will to the people, entrusting the Law to Moses. This secluded place and being alone by themselves indicate the search for a moment of prayer (Lk 9, 28). This divine passivity reveals that Jesus did not make a demonstration of His power, but that the Father and the Spirit participate in His transfiguration.

Mk 9,3: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them.

The white clothes remind us of Moses who became resplendent when he talked to God on the Mountain where he received the Law (Ex 34,29-35). Let us take note that the scene of the Transfiguration follows the classical scheme of biblical theophanies. The scene of the epiphany has an eschatological dimension. The apocalyptic expression metamorphousthai means the transformation into another existence, into a celestial being. The doxological dimension fills the being of Jesus transforming this instance in a more kenotic moment of His existence, of His messianic mission: the way of the Cross. The
face, that part of the body, which is more inclined towards the others, radiates something divine. The clothes becoming dazzling cannot hide the luminous glory of the transfigured body of Jesus. Jesus receives this doxa as an anticipation and guarantee of its eschatological reality. The Jewish apocalyptic images (shining like the sun, becoming white as light) express the completion, the fulfillment, the divine sphere. Mt 13,43 says: “Then the virtuous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father!”

Jesus did not receive at this time His divine nature (as the theory of Hellenistic mysteries stated), but rather He makes it visible to His closest disciples, revealing it through the metamorphosis which is the transfiguration. In Mark, the transformation of the external figure of Jesus is manifested in the resplendent robes (Mark 9, 3), Matthew speaks of His face shining like the sun (Mt 17, 2) and Luke speaks of Jesus transformed, transfigured while praying (Lk 9, 29). As we have already seen, the divine passivity shows it is God at work, revealing the divine nature of Jesus.\footnote{Mk 9,4: Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.}

Elijah and Moses, the two most important leaders of the Old Testament were talking with Jesus. Moses represents the Law, Elijah the prophecy. As representatives of the Law and the Prophets, they bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah, an important note in Matthew. (cf. Mt 5,17; 7,12; 11.13; 22,40), because for Matthew, Jesus is the one who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. Luke holds that the conversation was about the Death or the Exodus of Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 9, 31). Therefore, it is clear that the Old Testament, the Law as well as the Prophets already taught that for the Servant Messiah, the way to glory must go through the Cross.

Mk 9, 5-6: Then Peter spoke to Jesus: “Rabbi”, he said “it is wonderful for us to be here so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”. He did not know what to say; they were so frightened.

Peter expresses a feeling of well being and wants to prolong this pleasant moment on the mountain. He offers to build three tents. The “tent” is the abode of real people during the Exodus, that, too, becomes a symbolic reality of the expression “the Tent of Meeting”. Of the 129 times the expression “tent of meeting” appears in the Pentateuch, 33 times are in the book of the Exodus. The tent, associated with the image of the “cloud” can be a sign both of permanence as well as itinerancy for the people of God.

Despite the spontaneous suggestion of Peter, Mark says he was frightened and did not know what to say and Luke adds that the disciples were sleeping (Lk 9, 32). They were struggling to understand the Cross! Very much like us
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Some commentaries point out that the proposal of Peter to build three tents is but a misunderstanding.\(^\text{13}\) He has in mind the “Feast of the Tabernacles” which is eternal and definitive and could not understand that the sign indicates that such reality must be realized in the Cross-Resurrection.

Mk 9,7: And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud: “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him”!

The cloud coming down and enfolding them with its shadow is a symbolic image that we find throughout the Bible, especially in the Book of Exodus, and that means an open-ended conclusion (Ex 40, 34-38). We find the same expression in the Gospel of Luke, in the passage of the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the Child will be holy and will be called the Son of God.” (Lk 1,35)

Then, a VOICE from the cloud strengthens the presence of God and its manifestation. The voice that comes from the cloud, in the transfiguration, refers to another voice, that is a new Word of God, who has come as Good News: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!” (Mk 9,7b. cf. Mt 17,5). The Mother of Jesus in Cana of Galilee, gave the same direction: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2, 5).

To the divine vision, we have to add listening: the voice that comes from the cloud is a declaration of faith in Jesus. It is also the interpretation of an event that does not come from man, but from the logic of God. It is therefore understood that the vision alone does not suffice. It is necessary to listen and to follow, and according to John to reach a point where we come to “believe without seeing” (cfr. Jn 20, 29).

Mk 9, 8 - Then suddenly, when they looked around they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus.

Thus, the passage ends in the same way it began: Jesus alone with His disciples on the mountain. The presence of the three disciples in solitude, the same ones who will be present in Gethsemane (Mk 14, 33 et par) suggests that this is an experience that illuminates the tragedy of the violent death of Jesus. The journey of Jesus to Jerusalem where He was to die, is not a resigned submission to a historical inevitability, it is not the failure of a project, but the revelation of His true identity. He will appear as the faithful Son in a unique relationship with God. This is the total self giving of His love and His full freedom. “This love and this freedom point to a world that already exudes in His daily gestures and words and which the disciples were able to see in a privileged way”\(^\text{14}\).
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John sums up this experience at the very beginning of his Gospel. “and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1, 14b). Moreover, Jesus Himself is the Voice, the Word, the Face of God incarnate, who has pitched His tent among us (Jn 1, 14a).

The revelation of the divine voice also indicates the commitment that the disciples must take: not the ecstatic contemplation of beauty or the paralyzing fear before the divine, but a full and responsible adhesion to His Voice, Word and Life: “Listen to him!”

This is to accept the words of Jesus along the way of the Cross, in the following of Christ: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross everyday and follow me” (Lk 9, 23). The Risen Jesus is already present among us and by His transforming power, we can undertake the same journey in His footsteps up to the Cross.

When Jesus is covered in glory, a voice from heaven says: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!”. The term “beloved Son” recalls the figure of the Messiah Servant announced by the prophet Isaiah (cf Is 42, 1). The phrase “Listen to him!” recalls the prophecy that promised the coming of a new Moses (cf. Dt 18,15). In Jesus, the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. The disciples can no longer doubt. Jesus is truly the glorious Messiah and the way to glory passes through the Cross, as was also announced in the prophecy of the Servant (Is 53,3-9). The glory of the Transfiguration is the proof. Moses and Elijah confirm this. The Father is the guarantor. Jesus accepts it. Finally, Marks says that, after the vision, the disciples saw no one but Jesus only.

Matthew offers an additional information, saying that the disciples, hearing the voice, fell to the ground. And Jesus approached them and touched them, saying: “Rise up, do not be afraid” (Mt 17,7)

This imperative becomes the motto of this meeting:

“Religious life: rise up and do not be afraid!”

III. IN SEARCH OF NEW WAYS OF FOLLOWING CHRIST (ACT)

In this third moment, we want to take up some significant aspects of our reflection to enlighten us in our being and in our actions, to guide us in choosing our priorities, to strengthen us in our journey as God’s people.

After the experience of the Transfiguration, Jesus made the decision, in total love and full freedom, to undertake the way of the Cross. This decision is in line with His teaching: “If anyone wants to be a disciple of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16,24; Lk 9,23). This is the motivation of the following of Jesus, that which gives meaning to
the Cross. The desire to follow Jesus is primarily a call, a grace, because we are drawn by the Father. And our response is the free availability to enter into the Paschal dynamics of “losing in order to win” and thus, live a happy alternative according to the spirit of the Beatitudes. Three basic elements are connected to this event of the Transfiguration: the desire, losing in order to win, happiness in the spirit of the Beatitudes.¹⁶

Consecrated Life is called, in this moment of its history, to make the decision to embrace the Cross of Jesus, which is not a Cross of failure and despair, but a Cross of a love given, of joy in service: the Cross of the certainty of the Resurrection. The transfigured face of Jesus calls us and challenges us to set out in the radical following of His footsteps. In this journey, our being and our life become transfigured and consequently also the reality that surrounds us.

a) Transfigure our being and our life

The face: His face shone like the sun (Mt 17,2).

The experience of Jesus is so deep, it involves His body making it luminous and this brilliance is revealed in His face, the synthesis of His personal identity. God first spoke to us through the words of the prophets and the sages of Israel. In the fullness of time, the Word became flesh and was made visible through a human body so that our communication with God may become more intimate.

Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1,15). He is the face of the Word identified with the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned (Mt 25,35-36). He himself cried out on the Cross as poor and abandoned, and His cry, like that of all the poor is heard and accepted by God. It is not a cry of pure anguish, but of faith, because in it is the groaning of the Spirit.

Consecrated Religious Life is called to be the tender and merciful face of God among the people. The luminous face of the religious is an expression of the consecration of her whole being, of her life lived in the radical following of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life of humanity. Through the body, a person establishes relationships with all created beings and with the Creator. Our bodies are called to the Transfiguration, sign of the resurrection which is generated in us.

The question is: which face of God do we bear witness to? What face of God are we revealing to the people? How do we transform or allow ourselves to be transformed such that our face become a more faithful and creative mirror of God?

The Exodus: Elijah and Moses appeared in glory, they spoke about his
departure that was about to take place in Jerusalem (Lk 9,31).

Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah, two great personages of the Old Testament: Elijah represents the prophecy and Moses represents the law. Jesus enters the logic of God in the mysterious way with which He guides history. Jesus feels that His decision to go to Jerusalem is in harmony with God’s way of acting. His Exodus which began when He left the Father, dwells among us and finds fulfilment in the tragic end of His life, in which He revealed to us God’s solidarity with humanity.

Following the example of Jesus, we too, are invited to make our own exodus everyday, that is the passage from our human and limited reasoning to the logic of God, making our own His way of being, of acting in history, in order to continue His project of fulness of life for all.

What are the exodus that the Consecrated Religious Life must make today? With whom do we talk about this? How can we take upon ourselves the exodus of persons in this time of transition?

Listening: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him” (Mt 17,5).

Jesus feels Himself wanted and loved by the Father and thanks to this reciprocal love, an inseparable meeting is realized between the Father and the Son, who together offer us the gift of life. Both the Father’s proposal and the response of Jesus, spring out from a love without limits between the two, open to all of us without exception.

If we allow ourselves to be schooled by the beloved Son and listen to what He tells us, we will be made to enter into the intimacy of love that united the divine persons, to feel loved, and to open ourselves to the logic of the Trinitarian love and radiate this love.

Do we feel loved by God and by the Sisters of our Congregation? Do we radiate this love? How do we accept the gift of life which the Trinity offers us? Do we spread new life? What does uniting the vision and the listening to the text concretely mean?

The decision: As they came down from the mountain (Mt 17,9).

Peter wants to continue this rewarding experience of contemplating Jesus transfigured. But Jesus is confirmed by the Father in His decision: to go down the mountain in order to go up to Jerusalem and carry out His supreme act of love, giving Himself up to death.

When we feel loved and transfigured in our encounter with God, we also feel chosen and sent on a mission, but not to carry it out all by ourselves, but in communion with Him and with our Sisters.
What decisions should we make such that our Religious Life become more and more attuned with the plan of God? From which mountain of glory must Religious Life come down in order to walk with the people, with the poor, with the beloved of God?

b) Transfigure reality

The other: Jesus took Peter, James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain (Mt 17,1).

Jesus did not climb the mountain alone. He invites the three closest friends: Peter, James and John to pray with Him. The three are with Him since the beginning of His public life and it is important that they participate in this experience of Jesus. Elijah and Moses are two great prophets who have encountered God on Mount Sinai and Horeb in the decisive moments of their lives. Jesus fulfilled His mission in dialogue with history and with friends of His time. His experience of God is with the others (His neighbors) and in history.

In Jesus, God became the other, neighbor and mysterious, weak and strong. God is communion who enriches and brings fullness, but He is also the difference that extends communion beyond all boundaries. In God, the other is for us religious, a gift that enriches, but it may also be a difference that upsets, a poverty that frees us from selfishness.

What must we do to improve our relationship with the others? Are differences for us an asset or a threat?

The cosmos: ... Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain... and his clothes became as white as the light... a bright cloud covered them with its shadow, (Mt 17, 1-5).

The mountain is the ecological choice of Jesus for the place of an intimate encounter with the Father. The clothes, the synthesis of human endeavor that makes use of the various elements of creation, are also part of this experience. The cloud that appears with its inaccessible charm, cannot be ignored. It is the sacrament of the mystery of God’s goodness. The mountain, the clothes and the cloud symbolize the whole cosmos: what we can and what we cannot control are all integrated in the Transfiguration.

The cosmos is the house that welcomes us, it is the space where we move, which nourishes and sustains us. This cosmos, the sacramental locus of God’s revelation is threatened by so many undertakings that do not promote life but death. The ecological wounds and the wounds of injustice require a concrete action in favor of life in its fullness, according to the project of Jesus.

Are we “controllers” or “guardians” of the reality which God created
with so much love and goodness? Do we have this sacramental outlook towards the universe?

**History:** *Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here* (Mt 17,4).

The disciples, who have had the experience of transcendence, did not think of going down the mountain to continue the project of the Father. Jesus feels totally caught up by the deeper dynamism that leads the whole of history towards a universal reconciliation. Thus strengthened by this encounter with the Father, He sets out for Jerusalem.

The life, passion and death of Jesus reveal to us that God is present in the human history. He is not far from the pains of the oppressed in history. His decision to go down the mountain reveals that God is on the side of the victims. With Jesus, Religious Life is called to walk along the paths of history, continuing His mission.

Are we able to adhere to the dynamism of the Spirit who, in all times renews us; or do we remain fixed in our ways of being and acting? Do we discern and carry out the plan of the Father even when it involves sacrifice?

**The community:** *When they rejoined the disciples, they saw a large crowd round them...* (Mk 9,14).

Jesus comes down from the mountain with Peter, James and John, meets the community of the disciples and desires to strengthen their faith so that they can perservere and remain faithful in times of trials. In the dynamics of the community, Jesus respects the rhythm of each person in slowly absorbing His teachings while overcoming the interior dynamics of division.

We are God’s family and He takes care of each one of us, He accompanies us on our journey of searching, of loneliness and of conflict, but also of joy and celebration. God in Jesus manifested Himself as our servant. Religious Life is called to bear witness to communion and our communities are servants, at the service of the Kingdom and the fullness of life.

What place does the community have in my life? Do I consider the community as an expression of the Spirit that unites us with the power against all the destructive and egoistic elements aimed to break down unity in the community?

c) **An imperative, encouragement and mysticism:** Rise up and do not be afraid (Mt 17,7).

The touch itself and the words spoken by Jesus to His disciples who have fallen face down to the ground are now addressed to the Religious Life: Rise up and do not be afraid!
This passage also calls to mind the prophet Elijah walking towards Mount Horeb without any prospect for the future and without hope:

He himself went on into the wilderness, a day’s journey, and sitting under a furze bush ... But an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat”. He looked around and there at his head was a scone baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and then lay down again.

But the angel of Yahweh came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat or the journey will be too long for you”. So he got up and ate and drank, and strengthened by that food he walked for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. (cfr 1 Re 19, 4-8)

What food – mysticism – supports us in the journey of transfiguration? How do we perceive today the “touch” which invites us to get up, eat and go on?

“IN CONCLUSION”:

We are urged to read this memory of the transfiguration that the second letter of Peter has given us as a word of farewell. We want to paraphrase it, extending its meaning to the Consecrated Religious Life.

From Simon Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ; (consecrated religious life, servant, disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ) to all who treasure the same faith as ourselves, given through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. May you have more and more grace and peace as you come to know our Lord more and more.

By his divine power, he has given us all the things we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God himself, who has called us by his own glory and goodness.

In making these gifts, he has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them you will be able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice.

But to attain this, you will have to do your utmost yourselves, adding goodness to the faith that you have, understanding to your goodness, self-control to your understanding, patience to your self-control, true devotion to your patience, kindness towards your fellowmen to your devotion, and, to this kindness, love.

If you have a generous supply of these, they will not leave you ineffectual or unproductive: they will bring you a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But without them, a man is blind or else short-sighted; he has forgotten how his past sins were washed away. Brothers, you have been
called and chosen: work all the harder to justify it. If you do all these things there is no danger that you will ever fall away.

In this way, you will be granted admittance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is why I am continually recalling the same truths to you, even though you already know them and firmly hold them.

I am sure it is my duty, as long as I am in this tent, to keep stirring you up with reminders, since I know the time for taking off this tent is coming soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ foretold to me. And I shall take great care that after my own departure you will still have a means to recall these things to memory. It was not any cleverly invented myths that we were repeating when we brought you the knowledge of the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; we have seen his majesty for ourselves.

He was honoured and glorified by God the Father, when the Sublime Glory itself spoke to him and said: “This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favor”. We heard this ourselves, spoken from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have confirmation of what we said in prophecies; and you will be right to depend on prophecy and take it as a lamp for lighting a way through the dark until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your minds. At the same time, we must be most careful to remember that the interpretation of scriptural prophecy is never a matter for the individual. Because no prophecy ever came from man’s initiative. When men spoke for God it was the Holy Spirit that moved them. (2 Pt 1, 1-21).

What are the practical challenges for a concrete action, for us religious? We see and hear faces and signs of disfigurement and at the same time, we share so many signs of Transfiguration in the many faces of Jesus. What can we leave as a testimony and heritage to the future generations?
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2 GIOVANNI PAOLO II, Vita Consecrata, n. 17-19.
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6 CELAM, Documento di Santo Domingo, n. 178.
7 CELAM, Documento di Aparecida, nn. 392 e 402.
9 Idem, ibidem
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15 Some comments are inspired by the two writings of Carlos MESTERS
THE CONSECRATED RELIGIOUS LIFE IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
CHALLENGES AND HOPES

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Original in Spanish

In affirming our vocation and mission as consecrated men and women in the world of today, the grace of the Lord accompanies us to live and faithfully give witness to our identity. His light illuminates us with wisdom to carry on the mission He entrusts to us and His love encourages us to continue to encourage the young for the service of the Kingdom.

Dear Sisters and Brothers with this greeting, I wish that the peace and happiness of every person consecrated to the God of life permeate our lives and especially that Jesus may live in our hearts because once He dwells in them, we will understand better and will be more and more charitable.

The charity, mutual understanding and acceptance as brothers and sisters are seeds that we sow on this earth. We water these good seeds that the Lord of the harvest and also we, His workers, are called to sow. As consecrated persons, here in Latin America and the Caribbean, we have fertile land for major crops, we have mountains and valleys suitable for spreading the Word: goodness, justice, charity, joy and faith. Our continent is a fertile ground, with much hope and promise of life.

As the gospel (Mt. 13, 24- 29) says: “where wheat grows, weeds will also spring out”... We see this in our Latin American and Caribbean context which poses challenges to us and to the people sometimes leading them to despair, believing that evil has the last word and it is not worth spreading the good seeds of goodness, beauty and truth.
In this short space and time, I wish to present to you a partial overview of the consecrated life in Latin America and the Caribbean. I will first try to present some challenges which become for us the backbone of the harvest which we have been called to carry out. On the other hand, not all challenges are negative: some become the motor that drives the Consecrated Life to move on forward towards a more creative, generous and supportive action. These are the motors that unveil the prophetic dimension of announcing and denouncing and discerning. At a second moment, I will attempt to present some signs of life and hope that make Religious Life reveal its mysticism with an illuminating presence in society.

1. Challenges

I begin by highlighting a strong theme that seems to be the background of everything else that has occupied much of the agenda of our National Conferences in recent times. I mean the violence that spreads in so many ways, disguised in different attire, sometimes with such extremes of cruelty that surpass death in some countries ravaged by war or international fundamentalist terrorism.

1.1. Violence

Violence exists virtually in all of our countries; its victims are generally the impoverished people, migrants, displaced, marginalized, excluded from any possibility of aspiration for a better life. Here, the whole of consecrated life is challenged particularly from the African and indigenous perspective. The Latin American and Caribbean Church and its religious life respond to the challenge and are more present and active in Afro-American communities and indigenous peoples, in the slums of great cities where there are millions of displaced persons oppressed by violence and by injustice. It is also in these places of so much death that seeds of life spring forth. This is where we need to listen to the cries of our African peoples, the indigenous people, the displaced persons; common cries from peoples of different places, their groaning and pleas can be heard from our realities of poverty and violence.

1.2. Young lives at risk

This violence abounds in both the great urban centers and rural areas. We can name any country, starting with our own – Brazil – where we are now gathered for this meeting. Here, violence has a more tragic and cruel face because it is directed against the life of the young.

Here, the religious is challenged to defend the lives of children threatened by trafficking, domestic and international sale of human organs. Young girls
lose hope, dreams and desires because in addition to being forced to work at an early age, they are plunged in a situation not appropriate for their young age. Poverty deprives them of the right to basic education, recreation, skills development and even the meeting of basic needs. In this country where the extermination of the young is a daily agenda, the religious is challenged to defend the lives of youth.

There is in fact, a coordinated movement of various pastoral agencies that allows us to make pastoral action in defense of young lives threatened by selfish interests. The Conference of Women and Men Religious in Brazil (CRB) is affiliated to this cry in defense of young lives and broadcasts it on its website http://crbnacional.org.br. It also organizes meetings and uses other means to campaign against the killing of young people. We have consecrated persons who risk their lives just to defend the young people and denounce the extermination of children and the youth of Brazil.

1.3. Violence for financial interest

In Brazil and in almost all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, we can also name drug-related violence: from the south to the north, from the east to the west, we hear the cries against violence and death caused by this scourge. Consecrated life joins these voices threatened by drugs and by those who profit from it financially.

Just to cite one of the strongest cries for life and against violence: the Mexican society in the interest of peace. Mexico is a rich country because of inequality with its 50 million poor. There, out of the insecurity generated by drug trafficking, organized crime and immigration policies, the crisis is dramatic. The Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Mexico (CIRM) has joined the “society promoting life”, participates in the Caravan of Consolation for Peace with Justice and Dignity, which has toured the cities of that suffering country. We only speak now of Mexico, but again, this problem of drug addiction and drug trafficking has spread practically in all our countries.

1.4. The displaced

Very close to the previous problem of drug-related violence, the great migratory movements accentuate the fragility of persons all intent on having a dignified life. Our country is no exception to this: everywhere life is threatened, people look for a better place to build a future of hope and to have better conditions to enjoy life with dignity. This desperate search can be presented in two ways: first, the “dream/nightmare” to cross borders into the United States hoping to find the “promised land” there; and second, that of our brothers and sisters from Haiti also looking for a “promised land”, but
this time in the neighboring countries of Latin America including Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Peru... Both searches involving different migratory movements have a common denominator: the illusion of a more dignified life for the migrants themselves and for their families. In this case efforts are not measured and consequences, often fatal, are not considered because of the despair that confuses many of our brothers and sisters.

1.5. Internal faults that lead to violence

In Ecuador, the Consecrated Life is going through a challenge that flows from within the Church. This deep pain and confusion have been picked up by the Conference of Ecuadorian Religious (CER).

This was evidenced by a series of events from October 30, 2010, that is of public knowledge and which are related to the Church of San Miguel de Sucumbios (ISAMI).

The Executive Board of CLAR has gratefully recognized all that this ecclesial, evangelical community has done to incarnate the choices of the Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean (CLAR) and Ecuador (CER) in particular. In an open letter\(^1\) they stated: “We dearly love our Church in her many different facets and we wish, in fidelity to the Gospel, that there may truly be “a dwelling of truth and love, of freedom, of justice and peace...\(^2\) Definitely, we would walk the road of communion with her, as John Paul II himself encouraged us: *Seek unity without being discouraged at the difficulties that may be there along this path* (Redemptor Hominis, 6).”

In a time such as ours, where there is pluralism, where essential dialogue results in a deep questioning of whether our Church would agree to an open and truthful dialogue to arrive at peaceful solutions, accepting what is different and distinct, contradicting the description which Aparecida made on the constitutive essence of the Church as People of God: “God Himself goes after the lost sheep, the suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks of the parable of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep or of the woman who sought her lost drachma and the father who goes out to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are not mere words but the expression of his own being and acting” (DA 136).

“The Church as a «community of love» is called to reflect the glory of the love of God who is communion and thus attracts persons and peoples to Christ” (DA 159). The problem we are facing in Sucumbios has transcended the ecclesial areas: the direct intervention of the Ecuadorian government in an issue which we could not solve “at home” causes sadness.

Here is a challenge not only for the Consecrated Life, not only for the
Church but also to human society: to build a society that seeks to establish the Kingdom of God. The challenge is that every community, every institution acquire the ability to dialogue, to foster relationships, to seek unity in diversity. This is precisely what was affirmed by the new Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Archbishop Joao Braz de Aviz, in an interview with the magazine “Vida Nueva” of Spain: “Never turn off the light of consecrated life in the Church and more care should be given to the relationship between bishops and religious”. We will find solutions to problems that afflict us internally and externally through dialogue, transparency and affection for those with whom we work in the building of the Kingdom through a common search for a deeper communion of life in abundance.

1.6. Some challenges

We could continue listing and deepening many other challenges of the society in which we live our consecration. But our initial proposal was to discuss challenges and hope. I am aware that we will not, in this short space and time, exhaust neither one nor the other, especially when we attempt to make the first nourish the second, i.e., the challenges to nourish hope and become the realization of our dreams. In this regard, allow me to enumerate a few challenges which make consecrated life become ever more creative in order to respond adequately. We thus recognize that in some countries, populist governments act only for their own interests, while corruption prevails, or there is a lack of policies to ensure a dignified life for all human beings. The secularization of some countries is visible and increasing. We cannot also ignore the lack of education towards citizen participation, the loss of historical memory, the media imposed relativism. On the one hand there is a stream to the left and on the other, right and so on… Unfortunately, in our continent citizenship no longer exists. Often enough, obedient only to the powers that be which asked us, we spread “a good gospel to good people”. This overview points out to violence without limits and boundaries as the main problem which, more than what has been mentioned above, is also manifested in the exploitation and destruction of our mother earth, in labor bondage, trafficking in persons especially women and children, in the purchase and sale – not of consumer goods but – of human organs. Although these problems are not intrinsic to us as religious, we must recognize that we are not totally free of guilt especially when we are silent in such situations. Moreover, Consecrated Life glows with a radiant face, with a heart aflame and passionate, with a commitment in defense of life in all its forms, from birth to natural death. To say that the challenges are obvious but not all religious are involved as prophets would be unfair if we do not recognize at
the same time so many who, anonymously or publicly - as did Sr. Dorothy Stang – spend their lives everyday in defense of life against all forms of violence, and against any threat of death. Finally, let us emphasize that in speaking of challenges which Consecrated Life now faces, we cannot say that they are entirely extrinsic as if they came only from factors not related to us.

In discussing the highlights and shadows of our journey in Latin America and the Caribbean, we may experience the uncertainty of those two disciples of Emmaus (cfr. Lk 24, 13 – 15) and we become lost in: emotional problems, personal idolatry, rejection of institutions, difficulties in the exercise of authority and animation, finding a balance between autonomy-flexibility-requirements, emergence of new cultural models which are virtuals, upsurge of physical illness, fragmentation of families, transference of individual problems to the community, tendency to flee as a form of evasion, generation gap, search for the limelight, indifference and immaturity, differing concepts of Consecrated Life, lack of coherence, accumulation of responsibilities, the more difficult aspects of our mission, the inertia of our formative projects...

2. Hopes

So far we have presented more shadows than light, more negative strokes than positive possibilities and more signs of death than life. However, as I stated in the beginning, our continent, Latin America and the Caribbean, is a promised land, a fertile ground where good seeds can be sown from end to end by God’s workers, with joy, hope and dreams. Aside from all that could be considered as an essential anemia, we now recognize what represents the hopes and dreams for this continent starting from the identity of the Consecrated Life, that is starting from our being women and men of the Kingdom.

As consecrated persons and as CLAR, we try to listen to God where life calls us in order to sow seeds of hope, peace, justice and joy; seeds of the Kingdom of God. With festive heart, as brothers and sisters, we defined the General Plan 2009 – 2012 and we are now living it. It is a journey for the coordination and animation of Consecrated Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean, taken as a proposal to undertake projects and formation in and for the mission, a project communally elaborated by many with their work and dedication.

This endeavor brings us to a biblical resolution: the invitation to listen to God. Already in Deuteronomy 6, 4-9, Yahweh asks us: “Hear, O Israel!!”, and gives us guidelines on how to love Him with all our heart, understanding
and energies. Then He revealed Himself to Moses in the desert and tells him that He had heard the cries of His suffering people in Egypt and had decided to liberate them. Our God is the God of life who is moved by the groaning of suffering in life. Jesus is the total response of this Father-Mother God to the thirst and hunger for a life with dignity, freedom, solidarity, a liberating life. He calls us and consecrates us as brothers and sisters entrusting to us the mission of defending and promoting life.

We hear this voice crying for life in the reality that surrounds us, reflecting on the challenges posed to us by the New Situations, acknowledging in them the Emerging Concerns with their hopes and sorrows, their challenges and perspectives, the stories and promises... We are aware of our limitations but we trust in God’s grace and the gift of living in community that makes us strong. As the poet said: “Traveler, there is no roadmap... the road is traced out while walking”. We carry on the work of animating the Consecrated Life with the Pauline exclamation of hope: “from where we have come, let us move on!”

Listening to God where life calls us, we are certain that we are motivated to allow ourselves to be transformed by the Spirit, source of mysticism, prophecy and hope. Thus, the inspiring vision of CLAR sets the General Aim and accurately defines the convictions that nurture our search for creative fidelity to our vocation, consecration and mission at the service of the Kingdom.

2.1. Inspiring Vision

Closely linked to the journey undertaken in these last three years and our Latin American and Caribbean people today, we try to respond to the current challenges based on this inspiring vision which is dynamic, citing the encounter of Jesus with the Syro-phoenician woman (Mark 7, 24 – 30) and the experience of the Transfiguration (Mark 9, 2 – 10). Jesus had to overcome His reluctance to undertake this encounter and dialogue in a diversity of culture, gender, race and religion...living the so called “crisis of Galilee”: rethinking His mission and recreating the fundamental experience of unconditional love. This mission style is confirmed in the Transfiguration: “this is my beloved Son, listen to him” (Mark 9, 7).

Aware of the new scenarios that make up our socio-economic, political, cultural, religious and ecclesial context, we hear the call of the God of life to recognize and embrace the diversity of the emerging new concerns with their needs and demands. This encounter consisting of listening to the reality, “Have mercy” (Mt. 15, 22) and the Word, “This is my beloved Son, listen to him” (Mt. 17, 5), illuminates and impels the action of the Spirit in
our process of option for the poor, humanization, communion, revitalization and transfiguration in creative fidelity (Vita Consecrata, 37) to the Kingdom, loving up to the point of martyrdom (cfr. Jn 13,1).

2.2. We can express our hope through the following convictions

a) The Word of God is the rock of the Church, it is the transversal axis of Consecrated Life, the soul of theology, spirituality and pastoral training; it brings us to a personal encounter with the living Christ.

b) Authentic listening is obeying and acting, it is to make life flourish in justice and love, it is to offer one's existence in society as a witness, in line with the call of the prophets who constantly unite the Word of God and life, faith and righteousness, worship and social commitment (cfr. Final Message of the Synod, 10).

c) The suffering face of the poor is the suffering face of Christ. They put to question the core of Consecrated Life and our Christian commitments. “All that you do with Christ has something to do with the poor and everything related to the poor is related to Jesus Christ” (cfr. DA 393).

d) Latin America and the Caribbean- Our great country is one and diverse, the common home to people identified by geography, history, culture, language, wealth and poverty, with their values, their faith, their difficulties and hopes and environmental awareness. The future of our country also lies in the hand of the National Conferences through an integration that respects each one's journey in an all embracing solidarity that reflects the unity and diversity of the Trinitarian community (cf. Puebla, Santo Domingo, Aparecida).

e) A new Consecrated Life is possible: an incarnation of mysticism, prophecy and hope at the service of life which is threatened, in harmony with the whole creation, with a lifestyle of the minority but which is more significant and evangelical, with a challenging presence and active and self emulating role of the indigenous people, the Afro-Americans, the young, the women, towards the promotion of a Religious Life which is increasingly becoming more pluralistic, inter-cultural and decolonized.

f) During these 50 years of memory and prophecy, CLAR helped to shape a new way of being Church, reading the Word and being in touch with history, in the light of the following of Jesus of Nazareth and His preaching of the Kingdom.

2.3. Prophetic attitude

In communion, we take upon ourselves the same fundamental values of
life, of God’s project and of human dignity. This same communion makes us denounce all that destroys the image of God, our Father-Mother, in all our impoverished brothers and sisters. In this sense, there emerges a great challenge which is at the same time a great sign of hope. It is “to work such that our Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, may continue zealously, to be traveling companions of our poorest brothers and sisters, ready even for martyrdom.” (DA 396) As religious members of the National Conferences that has just made the Latin American Confederation, we feel called to take on a common commitment in favor of life. With joy, we see so many projects that we can call “prophetic”, actions and initiatives undertaken by religious men and women in almost all our countries and which are focused on the promotion and defense of life. The challenges previously presented reveal the features and scenarios to which CLAR clearly intends to offer some signs of hope. One of these signs are the Seminars promoted by CLAR, that seek to give answers to specific issues. I will enumerate some of them:

2.4. Signs of hope through animation

These meetings organized by CLAR invite us to move ahead, help us not to stop, allow us to discover that our struggles and dreams are the same, they give us a broader outlook to see what we are doing in the different countries, we are enriched by the valuable contribution of each and everyone and we are encouraged in our efforts always to carry on. Thus, we reaffirm our convictions of identity, territory, organization, defense of life, of life that groans, of ecology, bioethics, formation, and also the importance of transformation, of change in social structures so that religious life keeps its place in the society and in the Church. These dynamics constantly invite us to challenge stereotypes and prejudices in our interpersonal and intercultural relations.

2.4.1. Signs of hope from the African and indigenous religious life

Our theological-pastoral pronouncements find their source in the Document of Aparecida: “Native and Afro-Americans are now emerging in the society and in the Church. This is a Kairos to deepen the Church’s meeting with these human sectors who are claiming full recognition of their individual and collective rights, to be taken into consideration in Catholicism with its worldview, values and particular identities, in order to live a new Pentecostal Church” (DA 91). This text enlightens us to convey the presence and action of God in the African and indigenous culture. This is a God who is near, foreseeing, joyous and kind³.
2.4.2. Signs of hope through seminars for the formation of animators

In contemplating the vocation and mission of Consecrated Life in our continent, we find many signs of hope. We joyfully realize the great diversity in culture and age of our brothers and sisters in the community, their passion for Christ and for the poor, their listening skills, the pedagogy of discernment, their testimony of martyrdom, the multiplicity of gifts and charisms, prayer life, the dynamics of circularity and decentralization in recent times, the vitality of our youth and the elders, participative leadership, growth in freedom, solidarity, co-responsibility and transparency...

From the Formation Seminar of Community Animators, enriched by a workshop on humanization and interpretative dialogue on the signs of the time, the participants returned to their communities, their conferences, their countries decided to animate in this new journey and its perspectives and thus:

a) Cultivate within us and among the members of our communities the capacity for goodness, to give without seeking a reward, to listen without judging, to love unconditionally.

b) Keep vigilant in the face of the inhuman increase of the spiral of violence that plagues our towns and surrounds and affects us, in order to respond creatively and offer signs of humanization, hope and life.

c) Open the doors of our communities and inclusive commitments to the civil society in projects on human rights, social justice, peace and ecology.”

2.4.3. Signs of hope in the prayerful reading of the Word

Another sign of hope is the effort of CLAR in animating both the prophetic commitments as well as the mystical stance of the religious through the communities and the National Conferences. In this regard, the use of Lectio Divina is worth mentioning. It enlightens our life and our mission, our prophecy and our mysticism. A team of Theologians and advisers of the Board (ETAP) has developed a rich material for reflection, prayer and meditation which is shared, in greater part, by the CLAR Journal. Its content is full of life, light, reality, hope, of life and God’s Word. This includes the cycle of Spiritual Retreats of CLAR, organized by the Biblical Commission (Sr. Lucia Weiler, Bro. Carlos Mester and Fr. Pièrre Jubinville). It deals with a triptych of exercises designed for these three-year period. The first focused on the theme of “Listening” and has had a very positive impact, even beyond the Latin American borders. The second volume is almost ready and it will lead us to reflect and pray on the theme of “Compassion” while the third will take us through the roads of the
“Transfiguration”.

By launching these seeds of the Word through Lectio Divina and spiritual retreats, CLAR hopes to achieve one of its key objectives, formation for discipleship. These are intended to provide opportunity, time and space for the holy presence of God in each one of us, in our communities, in our Churches, in our Conferences and at the same time, create unity with theological reflection and the mysticism of our Consecrated Life, such that, illuminated by the Word, we may give a prophetic witnessing which is at the same time unified and diverse in our way of loving, serving and animating.

2.5. Seminars

The rich and colorful treasures of the signs of hope of other seminars and activities promoted by CLAR cannot be presented in a few lines. I will limit myself to inviting you to visit our website (http://www.clar.org), where we share the programs, content, messages and conclusions of all this reflection:

a) Seminar on the Afro-American Consecrated Life
b) Seminar on the Indigenous Consecrated Life
c) Seminar on the Religious Brothers
d) Seminar on Systemic Change
e) Seminar on Charisms and the Laity: open to civic organizations working to build a society which is more humane, just, fraternal, united, more joyful and ecological. CLAR promotes the value of the laity because it recognizes among them the presence of our congregational charisms.

f) Seminar on the Amazonia: This seminar aims to create bonds of inter-congregational and inter-institutional networks of solidarity and hope for an ecological life which is being threatened not only on this part of the world, but all over the planet, which is now being hurt at its core. With this, CLAR hopes to find enlightenment that will help our institutions to come up with a more prompt and effective action which is renewing and transforming.

g) Haiti: inter-congregational mission. In this country, crushed by earthquakes – not only historical and recent, but one which is permanent – the presence of native religious is great and significant. At the same time, the presence of international religious has been generous and decisive. Now we also deal with the novelty of an inter-congregational reality led by the National Conferences, as is already happening in Brazil and Ecuador. Furthermore, the Presidency and the National Conferences of CLAR held its Board meeting in Port-au-Prince this
year as a prophetic sign of solidarity and closeness, of listening and learning, a starting point for a more effective engagement with the poor, the Church and Religious Life in Haiti.

**h) The Second Congress of the New Generations of Consecrated Life:**

This Congress is aimed at revitalizing the Consecrated Life and the New Generations. Starting from the journey traced out by CLAR, the New Generations feel compelled to express their own clamor coming from their charisms and cultures in order to generate and propose new features of Religious Life from their own experience of a personal encounter with Jesus, source of mysticism and prophecy for the consecrated person who is willing to listen, discern and learn how to build a new humanity.

**In Conclusion**

"To better carry out this mission of sowing seeds of hope, as Consecrated Life, we need to build communion among us. Normally, we form communities or we participate in groups of animation, not out of sympathy or friendship. It is the Lord who calls us. He will give us His Divine Ruah so that, being distinct by congregations, we can build a happy and simple communion, evangelical and prophetic. It is a great challenge that requires creativity and initiative on our part. To accomplish our mission and build communion, we need a spirituality, mysticism, we need to invest time, effort and talent and take care of some tasks. Living as religious in the Kingdom of God is above all, a grace. It gives us the opportunity to meet other people and through them, meet Jesus Christ Himself (cf. Mt 25,40); it connects us with the experience of Religious Life of other congregations and even of other countries. It allows us to listen to God where life calls, it gives us the chance to be energized by so many people who suffer and long for the fullness of life. Finally, it allows us to animate our brothers and sisters to build the Kingdom in this world, in our cities, countries and continents; it offers us many opportunities to be mediation of God’s saving grace to others. Living in complete dedication one’s consecration is for each one a means of sanctification, of transformation in Jesus Christ".

**Ways to recognize the trials and challenges in order to enrich, internalize and realize our hopes**

**1ª.** What scenarios and concerns are more pressing for our life and mission as consecrated persons?

**2ª.** What implications do these scenarios and emerging concerns have in our formation and our life and mission?
3ª. What elements of our congregational charism coincide with the hopes and challenges of Latin America and the Caribbean?

4ª. How can these hopes and challenges determine our choices and commitments?

5ª. What are our personal and congregational commitments which actually contribute to the recognition of the theological citizenship of the poor?

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1 Carta abierta de la CER sobre ISAMIS - Para CEE, Nuncio Apostólico y otros obispos, Lunes, 23 de mayo del 2011.

2 Plegaria Eucarística V/b.

3 Revista Vida Nueva, 2.767, 10 al 17 de septiembre de 2011, pp. 8-13, España, 2011.


5 This reflection is taken from the Seminar for Indigenous Consecrated Life organized by CLAR for the triennium 2009-2012.

6 These are some of the Projects elaborated for the participants of the Seminary for Community Animators, organized by CLAR in the triennium 2009-2012.

7 P. Fernando Torre, msp, President of CIRM on the occasion of the election of Board Members of the CIRM
NOTRE DAME, Ind., September 27 2011 — Reports of the demise of religious life, to paraphrase Mark Twain, are greatly exaggerated, theologian Sr. Sandra M. Schneiders said in a Sept. 24 speech, drawing applause from the audience at St. Mary’s College here for the line, “I come to praise this life, not bury it.”

“Women’s ministerial religious life has a future in this time and beyond,” said Schneiders, professor emerita at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif. “We will not look today or in the future as we looked in the past — either in outer appearance, or in age, or in numbers, or in lifestyle, or in ministry. But we will be what we have been since the first century, disciples personally called by Christ to commit ourselves totally to him.”

Religious life will continue, Schneiders asserted, but communities of religious women will be smaller in number, renewed through reconfiguration and less institutional in their ministry. And, like the rest of the U.S. population, women religious will be older, but still active in their advanced years.

Schneiders is a member of Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Mich. Her talk, “The Future of Religious Life,” was hosted by the college’s Center for Spirituality and was held in conjunction with the
“Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America” traveling exhibit, which will be at the Center for History in South Bend until Dec. 31, before moving to the California Museum of History, Women and the Arts in Sacramento.

The exhibit, sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, tells the story of the nearly a quarter of a million Catholic women who have helped shape the social and cultural landscape of America since the arrival of the first Ursuline Sisters in New Orleans nearly three centuries ago.

The majority of the exhibit focuses on what Schneiders calls the “institutional boom period” of the mid-19th to mid-20th century, when thousands of women religious, many of them foreign missionaries, provided education, medical care and social services for the great waves of immigrants who came to the U.S. from Europe.

“That period gave us a glorious, inspiring and astoundingly productive model of large contingents of sisters engaged in hierarchically governed ecclesiastical apostolates in Catholic institutions such as schools, hospitals and social service agencies,” Schneiders said. “But this model fit its time, not ours. That was then, but this is now.”

At the height of the surge of women entering the convent after World War II, there were more than 180,000 women religious in the U.S., compared to just under 60,000 today.

“A cohort of 59,000 to 60,000 people totally committed to the quest for God and the promotion of Jesus’ reign in this world is not, on the face of it, an ecclesial disaster, much less a scandal,” Schneiders said. “There are plenty of things to weep over in our church these days, but women’s religious life, I would submit, is not one of them.”

In fact, there are about 10,000 more religious women in the U.S. today than there were at any point between 1720 and 1900, a time more comparable to our own, when fewer religious women “in small, widely dispersed groups were doing whatever needed doing for whomever needed it and with whoever wanted to help them,” she said.

The unusually high numbers between 1900-1960 meant that the decline after 1970 — caused more by historical and societal factors like smaller Catholic families and expanded opportunities for women — seemed especially precipitous, leading some to attribute it to infidelity, which Schneiders called “pseudo-theological nonsense.”

“The same logic that concludes that the AIDS epidemic is God’s way of wiping out homosexuality apparently suggests to these people that God is also purging the church of evil Vatican II nuns,” she said, adding that the
opposite belief — that God rewards fidelity with worldly success — is also flawed theological reasoning.

“Religious life is not a for-profit venture whose product needs repackaging or a new advertising campaign because the bottom line is not showing a profit,” Schneiders said. “The real question is, are the people in religious life today truly called to that life? Are they living it with integrity and passion? And are they offering it clearly and compellingly to people who are genuinely called to it today, even though, for many reasons, these will probably be fewer than in times past?”

Her answer was a resounding yes.

“Religious life is the oldest vocation life form in the church, preceding both matrimony and ordained ministry as public vocations in the church,” she said. “And even in its worst times of internal corruption and external persecution, the church has never been totally devoid of this lifeform. Indeed, it has at times been the best hope of the church in crisis. Romantic rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, religious life is more like a sturdy dandelion than a delicate rosebush in the frequently unkempt garden of the church.”

What will be different in the future, however, is the age of most religious women and, more importantly, their ministry, Schneiders said.

Women religious will continue to be older than in generations past as many of them reach higher life expectancy levels in good health and smaller numbers of younger people enter. But this mirrors the larger American culture, where the most productive years of adulthood are now 50 to 75, rather than 35-45, Schneiders said.

Increased life expectancies and better health in later years has prompted a revision of the typical lifecycle pattern, even in our “youth-fixated, age-denying culture,” she said. It’s not unheard of to see parents of toddlers in their 50s, marathon runners in their 60s, candidates for political office in their 70s, Supreme Court justices in their 80s — and religious women active in ministry even into their 90s.

“Whatever was the case in 1950, today religious life is not for kids,” Schneiders said, describing the implication of these lifespan changes on religious life. “I suspect the lifeform will remain, from now on, an adult vocation…It is probably really not desirable that people enter religious life before their late 20s or early 30s because they are culturally and psychologically unlikely to be ready for a permanent life commitment.”

Admittedly, fewer will be entering religious life, but again Schneiders
noted that the vitality of religious life is not a function of numbers.

“I doubt we will ever again see a surge like that of the post-World War II influx. But, as the first hundred years of religious life in this country attests, we do not need hordes of novices to scrub miles of gleaming corridors in giant motherhouses or armies of young nuns to staff the institutions of a ghetto church defending itself against the world. And it is certainly not our vocation to supply a huge corps of docile, unpaid workers for the hierarchy’s projects,” she said.

This shift from institutionalized ministries that most Catholics today associate with religious women to new models of ministry may be the most dramatic change — and the one most difficult for some in the church to accept, given the propensity to see the model in which Sisters staffed schools and hospitals as the only one possible.

“Even if the necessary resources were available to revive the institutional apostolates of the pre-conciliar century, especially those directed primarily to the needs of people at the two ends of the life-cycle, children and the sick and dying, these ministries may not be where religious are most needed today,” she said.

The disappearance of many of these institutions, such as Catholic schools, left religious women “not just economically jobless but ministerially ‘homeless,’” Schneiders said. This led many of them to relocate into parish and diocesan ministries, where they were often abused by the clerical power structure. Quipped Schneiders: “Women religious probably hold some kind of record for most people who have been fired because they are competent!”

Increasingly, religious women have taken their expertise into ministries that, while still in continuity with those of the past and arising directly out of their communities’ charisms, are not ones most Catholics tend to associate with “the Sisters.”

Schneiders grouped them into four “clusters”:

* Social justice ministers focused on systemic or structural change, whose “theological glue” tends to be Catholic social teaching. These include social scientists, activists, lawyers, political and community organizers, economists and sociologists, urban farmers and legislators.

* Ministers who work directly with the victims of social injustice or natural disasters, whose theological glue is deep compassion for the suffering Body of Christ. These include chaplains, social workers, counselors, literacy tutors, providers of child care or elder care, managers of low-income housing, those who work in homeless shelters or with victims of
torture or sex trafficking.

* Intellectuals, scholars and artists, whose theological glue is faith seeking understanding in our time. These include composers, performers, journalists, writers, teachers and researchers in theology, philosophy and the sciences.

* Ministers who address the thirst for meaning and transcendence, with the theological glue of spiritual nourishment and growth. They work in spirituality centers, campus ministry, spiritual direction, retreats, holistic healing, or as popular writers or speakers on the lecture and workshop circuit.

These charismatic and prophetic ministries differ from previous ones not in their service or witness, but primarily in their individualization, which some initially saw as a “loss of corporate identity because Sisters were not all doing the same thing,” Schneiders said.

But such individualization — partly a function of professional specialization by religious women — need not lead to individualism, Schneiders said. “Uniformity is not the only, or even the best, kind of social glue, nor large, homogeneous groups the only meaning of community,” she said. “Diversity can generate another, more organic, but more challenging kind of unity.”

Just as the first religious women to come to America traded large European monasteries for log cabins in the wilderness, so are today’s Sisters flexible about their living arrangements. “Responding to the needs of the People of God determines where and how we live,” she said. “First, the preaching of the Gospel where it is most needed. Then, everything else.”

These new ministries are more likely to involve collaboration with laity, including as associate members, and they often espouse an egalitarian and collegial approach that stems from the feminist consciousness of many women religious, which can lead to conflict with the “patriarchal sensibility of the institutional church,” Schneiders said.

“This does not necessarily mean that irresolvable or incessant conflict is inevitable or that strenuous efforts to work together effectively should be abandoned,” she said. “But it does mean that, as in the time of the prophets in ancient Israel and the prophet Jesus in relation to the institutional Judaism of his time, so today religious can expect ongoing tension with the hierarchy. Accepting this always painful dissonance, rather than denying it, feeling guilty about it or trying to placate those who reject feminism in theory and practice, is part of the new ministerial model that is emerging in religious life.”
Promoting the visibility of religious women, however, is one of the challenges of this new ministerial model. “How to be corporately and personally visible in a variety of non-ostentatious ways rather than through identical or even bizarre clothing or common dwelling or uniform work is a challenge we are still trying to meet,” Schneiders said.

“If we can reclaim and re-articulate our ministerial identity in contemporary terms, which I believe we are in the process of doing, we will become newly visible in the church,” she said. “As the ministerial dimension of the life becomes more coherent it will attract some serious, spiritually sensitive younger adults who will choose this life, not as a solution to their late adolescent identity anxiety, nor as a ticket to elite status and privilege in the church or assured peer group solidarity, nor as a haven of absolutism to protect them from the ambiguities of adult responsibility in a frighteningly complex culture.

“Rather,” she said, “they will choose it in response to a genuine vocation to seek God to the exclusion of any other primary life commitment and to promote the Reign of God in this world with all the energy of their lives.”

Heidi Schlumpf, National Catholic Reporter

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(The whole 40-pages monograph is available for the price of postage, at St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, IN 46556)
TESTIMONIES OF LIFE

INTERCONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY OF CRB IN HAITI

Sr. Marian Ambrosio, IDP

President of CRB (Conference of Religious in Brazil)

Taken from the Conference of Marian Ambrosio on Religious Life in Brazil, presented at the UISG Council of Delegates, Aparecida SP, Nov. 28 – Dec. 3, 2011

Original in Portuguese

On January 12, 2010, a violent earthquake of magnitude 7 in the Richter scale struck Haiti. Three million persons were affected by the earthquake which caused the death of more than 230,000 Haitians. The pain is still alive and tends to increase with the passing of months and the waning of attention from the international community. This pain strikes our hearts and impels us to offer our life in solidarity with and support to our brothers and sisters in the poorest country of America.

We heard so many words, we have seen many images of this earthquake and its consequences for Haiti. What we want now is to go ahead courageously in answer to the God of life who calls us to be, together with the community of the Haitians, a presence of prophetic witnessing, but also a generative presence of transformation and of hope.

Since the beginning, the earth moaned and wept. Every one recounts the same things: they heard a sound like a moan coming from the bowels of the earth (...). Before one can understand what it was, everything fell apart. It was an indescribable shock. Few seconds that destroyed and uprooted the foundations of life: earth, sea, vegetation and many, many persons. During these few seconds, one can hear not only the moaning of the earth but the human cry, that, at the same time, came out from the wounded heart of the two million inhabitants of Port Au Prince. Soon after that, there was total silence and the slow, very slow perception of the consequences of death. This cry, this silence of grief and helplessness were heard by the sensitive
and missionary heart of the Brazilian people. Along with many other initiatives of civil society, the Church of Brazil took a bold and prophetic step: send not only water, food and money, but also people. With the approval of the Pastoral Council of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil and with the support of the Caritas Brazil, the CRB prepared and sent a community composed of six religious women from six different congregations, to live side by side this experience of life and resurrection of the Haitian community.

The impact caused by the first contact with the reality of the city of Port-Au-Prince was violent: debris and evacuation camps everywhere. Seeing these ruins and these camps (about 800 in the city of Port-Au-Prince) propelled our desire to help rebuild the city. But another bold step was necessary. It was necessary to stop just visiting places, houses, tents. We had to go in search of persons, enter the tents, find the children, sit down with them, embrace the pain of this people in order to understand what was really important to do and therefore, make the right choices. Our main task was and is to be present and call people back to life, while we continue to support the brave initiatives of reconstruction.

What struck us most in this first contact with the communities of Haiti was the hunger. Hunger itself is monstrous, it is a monster because it dehumanizes, it brutalizes.

“I am here in Haiti from September 14, 2010 and from the time I arrived, what made me suffer most is the hunger” (Sr. Marcellina).

“I come inside a tent and a mother with a child in her arms looked down and said: ‘Sister, I am hungry!’ . This makes me always feel bad in my heart and when I go home, I sit at table and sometimes I don’t have the courage…”(Sr. Vera)

Hunger, for children, is an indignity, the hunger of children has no strategy, it has no methodology, it does not knock on the door. It comes and it hurts a lot. This is the time when we find the courage to decide what to do in Haiti. The people of Haiti first of all need our presence, they need to know that we are there and they are not alone, that we want to build with them a new hope that their children may live. We will overcome this moment.

It seems easy to say: sowing, harvesting, feeding, but it is not so easy to actualize. There is lack of everything: soil, water for irrigation, seeds, people to lead, a decent place to meet, human and financial resources, work materials. So many things are lacking and the list becomes longer.

Moved greatly by this reality, we have set to work. The six Sisters right now are working on three main areas of the mission. The first is overcoming
hunger: when we find a piece of land, an area where there is good soil, we start planting at once. The Sisters have gathered the communities of the Haitian people, have sown the seeds and had the joy of the first harvest. They continue to plant.

“This joining together to work is a very good way of working because this area is devoid of food and many people spend days and days without eating. This is a work done together, it is team work in the certainty that the situation will improve” (Sr. Marcellina).

The second area is an immediate consequence of the first and it consists in direct food production. The women gather and prepare a healthy and sufficient meal, which is also fruit of their work. The third area is mainly bringing together young people, youth and women with the aim of creating handicrafts: embroidery, sewing, singing, painting. This involves the hands, the mind and the heart to become creative. This nurtures hope and can become a good and positive source of income for some families.

“The Sisters who are in Haiti for the project of solidarity between the two Churches are there in the name of the Church and the first thing we must always remember is that they were sent for us. In the second place, what they are doing is what Jesus has done in the exercise of His mission: they live with the Haitian people, a friendly presence of solidarity among the poor and the needy. Thirdly, they are not there to impose anything, but living with Haitian, they are there to offer small gestures and projects of human development and promotion of life” (Don Sergio Castriani).

“We started this group of women for a course called: promotion and training of Haitian women. The course is in three phases: sewing, which is on going already for three months; then there is the work with pregnant women which is ornamental art work prepared by a Sister and finally, there is a group of women who gather once a month to weigh the children. It is a great work and they are enthused and I just thank you all there in Brazil for everything you do for us here” (Sr. Vianna).

This is a project of the whole Church of Brazil, in close communion with the Episcopal Conference of Haiti and with the Conference of Religious Men and Women of Haiti. The six religious women belonging to six different congregations, at this moment, are in Haiti, living in community. They have constituted a community and live daily the mysticism that sustains and is based on the same faith and the same vocation.

“The importance of the presence of these Sisters is crucial. There is no mission without missionaries. The missionary is the sign of the love of God, the missionary is a sign of the presence of God, but the missionary is also
one who goes in the name of her Church on behalf of those who send her to accomplish a mission according to the heart of Jesus” (Don Sergio).

In conclusion, I make my own the words of the Franciscan Dario Angel Carrero, Puerto Rican theologian: “In this moment of life in Haiti, the promised land is not a place: they are persons. Each one of us has the opportunity to come out of ourselves. In its extreme poverty, Haiti, offers us its open arms. It is time to come out from the rubbles of our words and passing feelings. We are the signs of the new Exodus, which brings us together in an embrace. We are the humanity promised by God to the earth which He has created” (Fra Angelo Dario Carrero).

“I thank the Brazilian people for the support you have given us, in this mission which is so difficult and so full of hope for this suffering people” (Sr. Aparecida).

“We know that without your help our missionary project of solidarity here in Haiti would be impossible” (Sr. Yolanda).

“We see to it that every contribution from Brazil reaches the poor because this is our mission here” (Sr. Maria Dalvani).

It is very important to contribute to the reconstruction of Port-Au-Prince. It is a very beautiful city, situated in a wonderful geographic context, the sea, constantly illuminated by the wonderful light of the sun. The people of Haiti is a happy people, determined, strong, friendly and welcoming. It is a people that sings, a people with a strong cultural identity, a sovereign people, lord of his own life and of his future.
The Prefect of the Congregation of Religious Don João Braz de Aviz, was nominated Cardinal by the Pope in a ceremony celebrated at the Vatican on February 18. In the afternoon of the same day, a group from the Executive Board conveyed their greetings to him on behalf of the almost two thousand General Superiors of UISG and expressed their desire to work in close collaboration for the revitalization of religious life in the Church.


The meeting of the Rome Constellation was held on January 12 – 13 with the theme Identity in Relationship. There were 70 General Superiors participants. In the light of two “external views on Religious Life”, one from a lay woman and the other a Protestant, they delved into the essentials of religious life today. The meeting with the Prefect of the Congregation of Religious, Don Joao Braz de Aviz, clarified several questions and stirred up mutual trust.

On February 6 – 9, the Gregorian University in Rome held a Symposium for Bishops and General Superiors on sexual abuse with the theme Towards Healing and Renewal. 11 General Superiors participated on the part of UISG.

Regina Mundi in Diaspora. When the Regina Mundi Center of Study was closed in 2006, UISG agreed to continue maintaining its initial objective of promoting religious theological education in developing countries. With part of the rent of the property, a fund has been created for a Scholarship grant which is now ready for launching. More detailed information can be found on our website www.uisg.org.

COSMAM, the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar, established in 2005, held its second meeting in Uganda in early February with the participation of 57 delegates from 22 countries committed to living in truth and integrity and to find ways to create fellowship by working for justice and peace. Fr. David K. Glenday participated on behalf of both USG-UISG. Sr. Marie Therese Diene, Daughter of the Sacred Heart of Mary from Senegal was elected as new COSMAM President and Comboni Fr. Julio Ocaña from Ethiopia as Vice-President.

Although UISG has no member in China, the Executive Secretary,
having been informed of the existence of a group of major superiors in the country, contacted the coordinator of the group who responded with great joy to this first contact. The latest issues of the Bulletin in English have been sent and they have recently asked permission to translate them into Chinese “in order to benefit more Chinese religious and priests as well”. The UISG Executive Board willingly gave its permission.

On January 23, a group of the members of the general curia of UISG and USG was invited by the Council for Christian Unity for a meeting with the students of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland who were then visiting Rome. The purpose of the meeting was to give a chance to know the Catholic Religious Life to the members of different Christian Churches. Following the presentations of the religious, several and varied questions were made by those present.

Tom Fox, director of the National Catholic Reporter and Joyce Meyer (Conrad Hilton Foundation for Sisters), held a meeting in Rome with various members of UISG to propose a project to give visibility to what religious women do, starting, for the moment, with Africa and Asia. These experiences can be a true prophecy in today’s world, but are often unnoticed or overlooked and the project aims to unveil them. At the moment, there is the need to create more networks.

**Date of the Plenary Assembly 2013**

The UISG Plenary Assembly held every three years in Rome, will take place from May 3 – 7, with the hope that on Wednesday, May 8, the participants can take part in the General Audience with the Pope. Shortly, we shall announce the theme and other details. For now, we give you the dates so that you can mark them on the calendar of the General Superiors.
## ESSENTIAL FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE

### We can renounce to...

- Great structures/works
- Vacation houses
- Centers of Spirituality
- Glorious projects
- Being considered indispensible
- Being professionals
- An Identity designed on a desk
- Our personal interests
- The veil
- Our personal point of view
- A hierarchical role
- Incensing the charism

### But not to...

- Meet the persons at “tu per tu” inside and outside the community
- Be welcoming, to see and listen with the eyes and ears of God
- Be persons with strong spiritual imprints
- Go where people “groan”
- Spend our lives for “useless persons”
- A high quality of being woman and mother
- An identity in dialogue with history and open to God
- Live in fraternal communion
- Live with passion the identity which is given to us from birth and which requires continuous conversion
- Be provoked by a different and contrary opinion
- Our part in history and in prophecy in the Church and in the world
- Share the charism even with those who profess a different religion or who do not believe

*Rome Constellation Assembly, January 2012*