IT WILL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU
(Mt. 20:26)

UISG BULLETIN NUMBER 152, 2013

FOREWORD 2

POST VATICAN II PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP 4
Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB

AUTHORITY IN THE BIBLE 17
Prof. Dr. Bruna Costacurta

GRACED COMPANIONSHIP: 29
A METAPHOR FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP TODAY
Sr. Mary Pat Garvin, RSM, Ph.D.

EXERCISING AUTHORITY IN AN ADULT COMMUNITY 44
Sr. Charlotte Sumbamanu, STCJ of Kinshasa

THE AUTHORITY OF THOSE WHO SUFFER 59
Sr. Martha Zechmeister, CJ

UISG ORIENTATION FOR MISSION 2013 - 2016 72

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS 74
This issue of the UISG Bulletin aims to be a recollection of what transpired at the **XIX UISG Plenary Assembly 2013** (May 3-7). It is the central event of the Union which, every three years, makes it possible for the participants with a common mission, to come together for a deep sharing of experiences and together chart a way forward in the following of Jesus at the service of the world today.

The Theme this time was a strong evangelical pronouncement: "*It will not be so among you!*".

It was an invitation to each one of the participant to rethink the leadership entrusted to her on behalf of the Sisters of her congregation.

The Conferences, one for each day, followed a clear sequence on the theme of authority according to the Gospel:

1. A look into the past 50 years to have a view of the perspectives which Vatican II has brought on the issue of authority. **Sr. Mary John Mananzan**, a Filipina, presented the principles outlined by the Council (participation, collegiality, subsidiarity) and the leadership models ensuing from these.

2. The second Conference focused on the service of authority from the Bible. Care of the Gregorian **Professor Bruna Costacurta**, Italian. With strong expressions, she presented two biblical figures: the ideal King of Deuteronomy and Queen Esther as a model of a force which is seemingly weaker but which prepared her to give her life for her people.

3. These two perspectives, historical and biblical tackled the central question about the mission of authority. The American **Sr. Mary Pat Garvin** responded with an expressive metaphor: to be like Jesus, in *graced companionship* that she described as a goad for discipleship capable of releasing all latent energies in the Sisters through quality relationship.

4. The fourth Conference, by the Congolese **Sr. Charlotte Sumbamanu**, stressed two inescapable aspects in the exercise of authority today: in *the community and as adults*, disqualifying personalistic styles and strategies that prevent the full development of the person.

5. **Sr. Marta Zechmeister**, an Austrian professor at the UCA in El Salvador indicated the guidelines of authority, strongly presenting the authority of those who suffer as an unequivocal mediation of the will of God. It is a
call for us to approach the reality of our world and question the powers afflicting it.

Each Conference – thanks to the simultaneous translation to 12 different languages – was followed by moments of silence for personal assimilation, then a sharing in groups and the possibility for a dialogue with the speaker. It will be impossible to describe right now the wealth of insights and spiritual riches ensuing from the 800 participants. A thoughtful “listener” tried to capture the “breath of the Spirit” present in the great assembly hall in order to make a draft of the **UISG Mission Guidelines for 2013-2016** aimed at enlightening the journey in the coming years.

There are other complementary communications and reports which cannot be included in this Bulletin. We do not want to leave out the importance of the open dialogue with **Cardinal Braz de Aviz**, prefect of CICLSAL who responded in great simplicity and spontaneity to the many questions of the superiors generals. He conveyed interest through his word and left an indelible image of a Vatican official in charge of Religious Life who actually appreciates and encourages it, one who trusts and is open to dialogue.

On May 8, the Assembly culminated with the participants meeting with **Pope Francis** who gave us the gift of his presence and his word in the Sala Paolo VI just before the general audience at St. Peter’s Square. On the Sisters’ part, there was an overwhelming welcome and an intent listening to his message which is profound, precise and characterized by the novelty and simplicity of his evangelical style.

In this issue we can only give the text, but we cannot fail to mention the joy and the sense of universality of the meeting, the energy in the dialogue, the utopia of a new Religious Life at the service of our world. Something that goes beyond the attentive organization is perceived. Communities of contemplative Sisters worldwide from whom we have requested prayers made possible the palpable presence of the Spirit of Jesus.

Two days later, (on May 9-10), the **UISG Council of Delegates** took place. In addition to other statutory functions, it was aimed at the election of the new **UISG Executive Board** for the next triennium. The new Board is very international and appears ready to pick up the energies released in the days of the Plenary to give support and direction in the coming three years.
POST VATICAN II PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB

Sr. Mary John Mananzan is a Missionary Benedictine sister. She obtained her doctorate degree in Philosophy major in Linguistic Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and a degree in Missiology at the Wilhelmsuniversitaet in Munster, Germany.

She gives lectures and seminars on Eco-Feminist-Creation-Centered Spirituality, Women’s Issues, Globalization and Transformational Education in more than 50 countries and is actively involved in developing a distinct Third World Theology.

Original in English

Introduction

On October 11, 2012, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. It is truly one of the greatest events in the history of the Church. The Church as a whole has seen revolutionary and mostly positive changes as a result of Vatican II. It has fostered liturgical, social, cultural and economic changes and developments. Christine Moulton of Salt Lake Tribune writes: Vatican II is considered the most pivotal church council in recent centuries, not because it declared new doctrines but because it changed the way the faith engages the modern world. (fr.the Internet: Huff Post: RELIGION). It opened the windows of the Church and let in the fresh air (although some critics think it also let in the hurricanes.) It made fundamental changes in how Church is organised and governed and in its relationship with other religions and with the secular world. There is no doubt that the religious especially the religious women experienced the greatest impact of Vatican II radically changing their self-understanding and their lifestyle.

Although Vatican II did not produce a specific document on religious leadership it introduced concepts in different documents that greatly influenced the perception of religious leadership after Vatican II.
Influence of Vatican II on the understanding of religious leadership

1. Participation

Undoubtedly the Church is still highly hierarchical. However, Vatican II did try to encourage more participation from the rank and file members. The Vatican II understanding of the Church is a “communion” of members sharing a common vision and task– to convince people of the world of God’s love and pointing to Christ as the example of how to love and serve him. In this Church lay people are not the passive spectators as they have been for a long time but were encouraged to be active workers in God’s vineyard.

This necessitates a change in religious leaders, in their understanding of their role and in their style of governance. From the highly centralized, monarchical style there developed at least in some congregations a more circular structure and an openness to listen to the rank and file members of the community. Dialogues were introduced and community assemblies became a practice. In many communities the term “superior” is no longer used and is supplanted with terms like “Coordinator”, “Moderator”, etc. Here I will still use the word superior since it is still being used by the greater majority of religious communities.

2. Collegiality

Wikipedia describes collegiality in the Roman Catholic Church thus “Collegiality refers to the doctrine held in the Roman Catholic Church that the bishops of the world, collectively considered (the College of Bishops) share the responsibility for the governance and pastoral care of the Church with the Pope. This doctrine was explicitly taught by the Second Vatican Council, though it is grounded in earlier teaching. One of the major changes of the Second Vatican Council was to encourage Episcopal conferences (bishops’ conferences).

In religious leadership, this was expressed in the collective decision making made by General Superiors and their Councils, Prioreses, Abbesses and Provincials with their respective Councils. Down the line local superiors likewise call community assemblies to discuss and decide on issues affecting their communities or their apostolates.

3. Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity is an organizing principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. Political
decisions should be taken at a local level if possible, rather than by a central authority. (Lew Daly (2010-01-08). “God’s Economy”. The Financial Times. Retrieved 2010-01-25.) The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

In religious leadership this means that higher superiors allow local or lower superiors to decide matters within their area of jurisdiction and do not interfere unless it is referred to them. This prevents micro-management which is demoralizing for lower officials and is a waste of energy for the higher superiors. Micromanagement can also encourage the members to go over the head of their immediate superiors and go straight to the highest authority which is detrimental to the whole system.

4. Accountability

Although there is no specific mention of accountability in Vatican II documents, the first three principles of participation, collegiality and subsidiarity necessarily includes leadership accountability. This is going away from the absolute monarchy type of leadership where the leaders are only accountable to God and to themselves and not to their constituencies.

With the new understanding of Church as a community with a common vision and responsibility, Vatican II obliges religious leaders to be accountable to their members. In religious communities, general and provincial chapters include reports of the highest superiors to their members on how they have fulfilled the vision-mission of the congregations or the resolutions and recommendations of previous chapters.

Post vatican II religious leadership models

I would like now to describe three leadership models in detail which were influenced by the principles described above that have their roots in the Second Vatican Council.

I. Servant leadership

A. Origin of the Term

The term “servant leadership” was popularized in the early 70’s just after the close of Vatican II. The term “Servant Leadership” and “Servant Leader” were coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. He coined this phrase in his essay “The Servant as Leader”. Greenleaf worked a long time AT&T
and spent most of his career on management studies, management development and management training. After working at AT&T he started a career as visiting lecturer and management consultant for many companies, universities, churches and non-profit organisations. In 1964 he founded the international non-profit foundation named Center of Applied Ethics, which was renamed to The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership in 1985.

The idea for his essay, “The Servant as Leader,” came out of reading Journey to the East by Herman Hesse. The story is about a group that went on a mythical journey. The main character of this story is Leo. Leo is the companion and servant of the group, but he somehow sustained the group with his spirit and created in them a sense of well being. Everything was going well until Leo disappeared; the group fell apart and the journey had to be prematurely interrupted. The group cannot exist longer without their servant Leo. After reading this story Greenleaf came to the insight that a good leader is primarily a servant. A good leader must first be a good servant. Therefore he wrote down his essay The servant as leader. But his idea also came from his Christian legacy and consciously or unconsciously by the Second Vatican Council:

Though his terms are secular, his definition of leadership is the clearest statement of his belief that the needs of followers are holy and legitimate, and the leaders use of power arises from the consent of the followers. Greenleaf was very focused on action and ends, and he held a Sabbath attitude about organizational life. Like Christ, who said “The Sabbath was made for man(sic), not man(sic) for the Sabbath”[2] Greenleaf believed that institutions should serve people. He also felt that he was on the threshold of an important historical moment, of a paradigm shift in the collective American response to formal authority.(Wikipedia, Robert Greenleaf)

B. Biblical Roots of Servant Leadership

There are Biblical foundations for the concept of Servant Leadership. The word “servant” comes from the Hebrew word “eved” which originally meant slave but evolved to mean trusted. In Isaiah, chapter 52 the “servant of Yahweh” was identified with 1) the nation of Israel serving God, 2) The faithful remnant who served God in difficult times and 3) the Messiah who became the suffering servant.

In the New Testament, Jesus connected himself with the tradition of servant leaders and the suffering servant of Yahweh. (Luke 4: 18-19-) In Mark 9:33-35-JESUS prescribed for the leaders of his Church the same quality: “Those who want to be first must be the very last and servant
(diakonos) of all. And in John 13: he dramatically demonstrated this prescription by washing the feet of the apostles, an outstanding gesture of servanthood.

C. Characteristics of a Servant Leader

Larry C. Spears, who has served as President and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership since 1990, has extracted a set of 10 characteristics that are central to the development of a servant leader: I have taken his categories but have adapted them to the religious leader and to a religious context. I have also incorporated some ideas of Howard Young in his article: “Rediscovering Servant Leadership” (Internet: Assemblies of God: Enrichment Journal)

- **Listening and Availability:** Superiors as Servant Leaders are present to their Sisters not only physically but with their whole being. A servant leader has the motivation to listen actively to subordinates and support them in decision identification. The servant leader particularly needs to pay attention to what remains unspoken. This means relying on her inner voice in order to find out what the body, mind and spirit are communicating.[4]

- **Empathy:** A servant leader attempts to understand and empathize with others. Sisters are entitled to respect and appreciation for their personal development. She should not make herself the measure of judging others but should take them as they are.

- **Healing:** A great strength of a Servant Leader is the ability for healing herself and others. A servant leader tries to help people solve their problems and conflicts in relationships, because she wants to encourage and support the personal development of each individual.[4] This leads to the formation of a community environment which is dynamic, happy and free of the fear of failure.[5]

- **Awareness:** A servant leader needs to gain general awareness and especially self-awareness. She has the ability to view situations from a more integrated, holistic position.

- **Persuasion:** Servant Leaders do not take advantage of their power and status by coercing compliance; they rather try to convince those they are leading. This element distinguishes servant leadership most clearly from traditional, authoritarian models.

- **Conceptualization:** A servant leader thinks beyond day-to-day realities. That means she has the ability to see beyond the limits of the daily running of the community but always has the vision of the congregation
before her having made it her very own vision.

- **Foresight**: Foresight is the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation. It enables the servant leader to learn about the past and to achieve a better understanding about the current reality. It also enables the servant leader to identify consequences about the future...

- **Stewardship**: Religious Leaders have the task to hold their institution in trust for the greater good of the Church and of society. Servant leadership is seen as an obligation to help and serve others. Openness and persuasion are more important than control.

- **Commitment to the growth of people**: A servant leader is convinced that people have an intrinsic value Therefore; she should nurture the personal, professional and spiritual growth of the Sisters in a well worked out plan of On-going Formation. She will develop gifted Sisters unthreatened by competence because she has inner security and healthy self worth.

- **Building community**: A servant leader’s priority is building a loving, prayerful, compassionate community. In turn her community should serve the greater community, especially the poor and the oppressed. [4]

(WIKIPEDIA)

II. Shared leadership

**A. Concept of Shared Leadership**

Another significant Post-Vatican model of leadership deviates from the monarchical, centralized leadership that characterized many religious communities in pre-Vatican times and can still be found even today.

According to Peter Smith, this type of leadership concept “believes that rather than relying on a single individual to lead to a successful endeavor, there is need of other group members to take on shared responsibility in problem identification, solutions, and action taking.”

This leadership concept believes in the importance of the individual, that individuals are interested in participating in the development of their well-being, that individuals are able to learn and able to change and can take on responsibility; that individuals and communities can identify problems in their lives, can analyze their situations, arrive at various alternative solutions and act on their chosen alternative; that people can work effectively together to change conditions that may be beyond their individual control; that community participation and group process are in themselves health
enhancing,. (United Way of the Fraser Valley.)

**B. Elements of Shared Leadership**

According to Robert Gallagher (2001), in the life of a community or institution there are three important tasks: 1) Accomplishing Tasks 2) Maintaining Relationships, 3) Providing for Individual Needs and Wants.

In accomplishing a task, someone has to initiate, make suggestions, propose group action, someone has to get the proper information and share this information. The community is a network of relationship and someone has to attend to foster relationships by encouraging, express group feelings, harmonizing, gate keeping and setting standards. Someone has to see to it that each member of the community has his/her own needs for acceptance, sense of importance and value, friendship, etc.

There is no reason why it must fall to the designated top leader to do all these tasks. Anyone who can do each of these tasks best should be assigned to it.

**C. Shared Targets for a Sharing Leader**

What specifically should leaders share with their co-workers or in case of religious leaders with their Sisters or lay partners. Phil VanAuken suggests the following:

* **Power** - the aim of the leader is to empower others, to encourage them to be source of ideas and decisions. This presupposes inner security in the leader

* **Feelings and emotions** - Leaders should be open both to share and listen to feelings. Leadership is more than making the right decisions. It is also helping people to discover who they are. By acknowledging their own humanity, they invite others to be similarly transparent and real

* **Time** - Time is a precious commodity and the leader must make a conscious decision to invest that time in people rather than in administrative functions

* **Personal needs** - Leaders should share with others in a sensitive way their own goals, frustrations, pressures and needs. This will make the community feel the need to pray for them and feel with them “true kinship.”

* **Trust** - Trust allows two or more people to disagree and still respect the motives of each other. It is the lubricant for relationships amidst frictions and differences.
* **Talents and gifts**- It is understood that leaders should share their gifts but they should encourage others also to share their gifts and talents. Members of the community should be helped to understand their role, how they can develop and use their gifts for the community.

* **Information**- As much information must be shared for decision making. Leaders must be givers as well as receivers of information. An atmosphere should be created that members have a desire to talk and listen openly and without fear.

* **Success and failures**- Leaders need to talk both about their successes and failures. Success stories encourage others to continue to persevere and failure stories help others to see the leader as a human being with problems like anyone else.

* **Prayer**- Through communal prayer we find encouragement, empathy, and commitment to seeing all of our life through the eyes of faith

### D. How Leaders Subvert Shared Leadership

What actions of the Leader go against the principles of shared leadership? Consider the following:

* **Abuse of power**- Large differentials in the relative power of leaders and followers can contribute to abuse. Power deprivation exerts its own corruptive influence and can make members of the community fixated on their minimal influence becoming cautious, defensive, critical of others and new ideas and may even engage in sabotage.

* **Hoarding of privileges**- Superiors nearly always enjoy greater privileges and when they hoard power and status they contribute to the growing gap between haves and have-nots in the community.

* **Encouraging deceit**- Superiors have more access to information. Patterns of deception whether they take the form of outright lies, or hiding or distorting information, destroy the trust that binds the superior and the community.

* **Acting inconsistently**- Diverse followers, varying levels of relationships and elements of situations make consistency an ethical burden of leadership. Shadows arise when superiors appear to act arbitrarily, unfairly or show favoritism.

* **Misplacing or betraying loyalties**- Superiors have to weigh a range of loyalties or duties when making choices. Leaders cast shadows when they violate the loyalty of the members of the community.
* **Failing to assume responsibilities**- Superiors act irresponsibly when they fail to make reasonable efforts to prevent misdeeds, ignore or deny ethical problems, don’t shoulder the responsibility for the consequences of their directives, hold members to higher standards than themselves.

(Craig Johnson, 2001 quoted in Shared Leadership by Michele Erina Doyle and Mark K. Smith 2001 and 2012 in Internet: INFED)

**E. Values of Shared Leadership for Service (Vincent Warner, Jr)**

§ **Collaboration** rather than **competition**—puts premium on truthfulness and admitting mistakes

§ **Capacity** to move to the other side—**compassion**

§ **Holds accountable** but does not blame. Blaming is covering up. Accountability offers possibility of growth.

§ **Willing to compromise** when appropriate and does not need always to control the outcome.

§ **Trusting and validating others** which makes possible to be joyful. Joy and cheer come from not always being right.

§ **Power is for participation**, not for domination—power with, rather than power over

§ **Putting oneself at risk** with humility and clarity.

**F. Reality Check List.**

In order to gauge the effectivity of Shared Leadership, the following questions can be asked:

Are those being served

* Growing as persons?
* Becoming healthier?
* Becoming more free and autonomous?
* Becoming more service oriented themselves?
* Showing hospitality to the least privileged?

**III. Religious leadership and power— from control to compassion**

Another post-Vatican perspective of religious leadership is with regard to the use of power. **POWER** is the ability to influence. It can either be
positive or negative. When power is expressed as a positive force, via affirmation and correction, it is expressive of CARE. When power becomes a negative force, via exploitation, manipulation or domination, it is experienced as CONTROL.

The dynamics of successful leaders find a key component in the way they give up any need to CONTROL and find ways to EMPOWER others. In our religious communities, the dynamics of power is as much present as in secular institutions. Abuse of power, thirst for power, addiction to power, holding on to power are not unknown in religious communities. In fact many conflicts in the convent are usually a question of power relationships.

But it is likewise true that there is a great source of ENERGY and POWER in doing good, in caring, in compassion that is found in religious communities.

It is therefore important for us to reflect on the dynamics of power.

**A. Various ways of using power**

According to Starhawk, an American-Indian feminist, there are several ways of using power: “POWER OVER,” POWER WITHIN” AND “POWER WITH.” She considers “power over” as essentially linked to domination and control, “power from within” to the mysteries that awaken a person’s deepest abilities and potential; and “power with “to the social power and influence people wield among their equals. Each type of power is rooted in a mode of consciousness and a worldview. Each has its own language and mythology and depends upon distinct motivations.

A religious superior can use power over by being dominant and tyrannical being conscious that “she is the boss”. Another may use her authority to discover the latent ability in herself and in her Sisters and can develop these latent abilities. Then she could use “power with” to gather the gifts and talents of all the Sisters for the good of the institution.

Michael Crosby in his book: The Dynamics of Power: From Control to Compassion, explores a paradigm shift in the use of power by leaders. I will try here to discuss the main points of the book. (See Power Chart) Although Michael Crosby did not write the book exclusively for religious leaders, it is remarkably applicable to religious leaders in their exercise of power.

**B. Power as control**

When religious leaders use their power to control, this is grounded in four forms: manipulation, exploitation, coercion and domination but it is primarily maintained by fear and intimidation. Any exercise of control by fear or intimidation is abuse. Thus religious leaders can be abusers consciously
or unconsciously. We are very aware of the current sexual abuse of the 
clergy and how this is covered up playing on the fears of the victims or 
subtly intimidating them because of the importance of their position and the 
general respect for them.

In religious communities, religious superiors can likewise cause fear 
and intimidation among their members by their words, actions and style of 
management. It is rare for religious superiors to do physical abuse but many 
can be prone to verbal abuse. According to Crosby this can be worse:

...verbal abuse can be more destructive in a relationship than physical 
abuse because verbal abusers often try to undermine one’s self- 
image and even destroy self-esteem. They find ways to tear apart 
self-image. Their goal, conscious or no, is to make the other feel 
powerless... Verbal abuse need not always be expressed in earthy 
language. It occurs when I relate to someone who is more introverted 
who gets overwhelmed by my extroverted behaviour. It occurs when 
I don’t give others a chance to talk or share their ideas before I move on. (Crosby, p. 58)

A religious community with an abusive superior will soon have members 
with increasing feelings of resentment, anger and dissatisfaction. This can 
result in outbreaks of rage, or in passive aggressive behaviour or in actual 
conflict. When this situation is prolonged it can even cause psycho-somatic 
illnesses in the community. It can also result in the loss of vocations, either 
in members leaving the community or inability to attract religious vocations.

C. Power as care and compassion

It is possible for a religious superior to undergo conversion and begin 
to use power not as a means of control but to show care and compassion. But 
this presupposes an insight into the effects of the use of power as means of 
control. Michael Crosby talks of his personal experience:

“When I finally realized that I had been using power in a way that 
was destructive and undermining my attempts to bring about the 
change I so desired, especially in my efforts to influence coworkers 
to change their working style or people close to me to commit to 
social change, I realized I had to change; otherwise I would only 
reinforcing the very control, abuse, conflict, and violence that I 
purportedly saw in other but not in myself.” (Michael Crosby, p. 89)

The converted religious superior has to let go of the dynamics of 
control and move into a way of CARE in his/her personal life, community, 
institution and other relationships. Crosby writes about the relationship of
care to power:

"If power is never neutral but either a force for help or harm that energizes or de-energizes, and if our way of influencing each other is grounded in ways that overpower or empower each other, then care, simply speaking, is the minimal requirement for all relationships that we consider to be positive, right or good. Since all relationships involve power, how we relate and influence one another in our relationships is critical if we are to have positive, right and good ways of being with each other. Since care is in the form of respect is the core requirement for such relationships, care constitutes the heart of the human condition, if our relationships are going to be constructive at all levels, including those in society itself. Our “first and unending obligation” therefore, is to meet the other as a person who cares. (p. 99)

Care is manifested in genuine affirmation and in nurturing correction and challenge. AFFIRMATION is a basic need of every human being. Everyone needs to be held in esteem, all need to feel respected and honored, to feel valued and worthwhile. We need significant others in our world to tell us we count. And once we are affirmed then the other genuine manifestation of care which is CORRECTION or CHALLENGE can be done. Religious superiors who do not correct or challenge their members are not really caring for them. But the correction must be grounded on genuine respect and affirmation for it to be effective. The effect is the development of FREEDOM and TRUST. In a setting of affirmation and correction, people feel they can be free to say what they think and feel and from this be free to be “who they are” empowering them as persons. TRUST is that dynamic that gets built into a relationship where people are free from fear and intimidation along with being autonomous and self-individuated. Trust is the necessary prerequisite for every healthy relationship. (106)

In this atmosphere of trust and freedom, the members of a community become empowered and healed of their previous wounds. When we are healed we are enabled to engage in creative thinking, positive feeling and constructive action. The spirit of competitiveness will be supplanted by collaboration in the fulfillment of the institutions’ vision mission. This will create an atmosphere of peace, love, and COMPASSION. This should go beyond our communities into the bigger society: As Crosby writes:

“compassion is the power and force of love released without exceptions or boundaries, into our universe. It is empowering care made universal. It consists of the effort to address the wrongs around us in ever widening circles of justice and mercy to embrace the world with such
a kind of care that we work not only to alleviate its pains; we also try to empower those who have been violated in such a way that they can walk free in the future. “

Our religious communities can then also be instruments of peace for society and move the world in the way of compassion.

Conclusion

The theme of our Assembly is: it will not be so among you. These words of Jesus was to contrast the way the world understands power and authority which is to dominate, to oppress and to lord it over people and His own way. How then should it be? We have shown how the Second Vatican Council inspired by the words and example of Jesus, had underscored alternative values for religious leadership which has influenced the three post Vatican II models of leadership, I have described, namely: servant leadership, shared leadership, leadership of care and compassion.

In being religious leaders according to the mind of Christ may we contribute to an ever widening web of compassionate relationships towards a cosmic circle of love and compassion.
“It shall not be so among you”: these words from the Gospel have been chosen aptly as the theme of this Assembly which wishes to reflect on “the service of authority.” These are the words uttered by Jesus after the request by the mother of Zebedee’s children to sit on his right and on his left. Turning to the other apostles, outraged by that request, Jesus says:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:25-28).

The exercise of power, instead of promoting growth and contributing to the common good, often turns into harassment, displays of superiority, and a desire to dominate and oppress which reduces the other to servitude, humiliating him, diminishing and violating the other. But among the disciples of Jesus it cannot be so, and in communities wishing to follow his way there is no place for power, but only for that exercise of authority which makes
itself into a loving service, a placing of one’s entire self at others’ disposal, to the extent of giving one’s life for those – entrusted by God – to whom one must serve as an example and guide on the arduous road to sanctity.

Sacred Scripture offers us many authority figures to whom we may refer in reflecting on this issue. I will limit myself in the elaboration of this argument by focusing on two points: first, in considering briefly Deuteronomy’s description of the ideal figure of a king, the authority *par excellence* in ancient Israel, and then pausing longer on a paradigmatic character, Queen Esther, who fulfils her royal status in offering to give her life for her people. Thus we will reflect first on a text of the Law, the Torah, which indicates a path of wisdom, and then on a story, particularly rich in elements that are pertinent to our theme, showing how one might live according to the path of wisdom indicated by the Torah.

1. The ideal king: an authority without power

In Dt 17:14-20 the Law outlines the figure of the ideal king desired by Israel and given by the Lord, a king who should not, with his power, rival the kingship of God, but rather serves to mediate the presence of the divine in the midst of his people. The text reads:

“When you come to the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me’; you may indeed set as king over you him whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not multiply horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ And he shall not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply for himself silver and gold. “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, from that which is in the charge of the Levitical priests; and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them; that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.”

Chosen by God, and standing in a special relationship of dependence
on Him, the king must live by faith according to the criteria of the Lord, in the awareness of being the subject of a special predilection, an election that does not flow from his abilities and personal initiative but only as a consequence of the free gift of God’s mercy.

His heart then, as the text says, must not exalt itself (cf. v. 20) and its exercise of authority should not be marked by power as is the case with the kings of the “nations that are round about” (v. 14): a brother, part of the people and standing in solidarity with it, he must exercise his function as a service to those who are his brothers, giving up the use and display of power’s usual forms. For this reason, he must have few horses, which were used for war and here symbolize military power; few wives, who often served as a means of forging alliances with other peoples and were thus instruments of political power as well as representing the danger of Israel’s absorbing ideologies and pagan religions; and, finally, little silver and gold, which is to say moderation in economic power.

The typical power traits are thus subjected to challenge, so as to indicate instead the true way which one must pursue in seeking to exercise authority properly: every day reading the Law, the Word of God, and conforming to it, in an attitude of dependence and obedience which makes of the king a servant of the Lord. In this way he will be able to serve the people entrusted to his care. Authority can require obedience only if it lives in obedience.

A typical figure of this king “after the heart of God” (cf. 1 Sam 13:14) is David, the youngest son of Jesse, the small one chosen by the Lord out of all his brothers, removed from his job as pastor of his father’s flock so as to become the “Shepherd of Israel” (cf. 2 Sam 5:1-2, Ps 78:70-2). David is the shepherd-king who, as opposed to the figure of the warrior-king Saul, faces the gigantic Goliath while refusing the powerful weapons offered him by Saul; instead he makes use of a sling and some pebbles taken from a stream, the weak weapons of the shepherd who goes to meet a formidable enemy with the serene confidence that arises from faith in the Lord (cf. 1 Samuel 17).

In the episode of the duel with the Philistine, two different ways of being royal are compared, but Saul’s strong kingship, marked by abuse, must give way to that of the shepherd-king who is ready to sacrifice his life for his people, not relying on the force of arms but in the saving presence of God. This constitutes true kingship, and so a true exercise of authority that becomes service and gift, bringing life to the brethren.

All this opens us to our second point, the figure of Esther, the weak and
helpless queen who shows herself in all her royal might when he decides to risk her life for the salvation of her people.

2. Queen Esther and the strength of weakness

The book of Esther, written in Hebrew, but with many additions in Greek, is a story of a legendary nature which is presented in connection with the feast of Purim, offering an explanation of its origin. Focusing on the experience of liberation that God works for his people by freeing them from mortal danger, its protagonist is a young Jewish woman, Esther, who has some features in common with the great figure of Moses, who also served as a means of salvation for Israel. It is a tale that teaches how authority must be lived, doing this by showing, negatively, the wrong use of power as bringer of death, and, positively, the “right” use that promotes and aids life.

I would like to trace now the history of this book, highlighting some of the most significant aspects and offering some interpretative keys. We will make reference along the way to both the Greek and Hebrew texts.

The Hebrew text begins with a description of a great banquet given by King Ahasuerus to all his princes and ministers. The power and wealth of the Persian king are made manifest in this feast and its opulence: it is an occasion of self-celebration, typical of worldly kingship, which lasts a full 180 days, followed by another 7 days for the whole populace. Meanwhile Vashti, his queen and wife, offers a banquet for the women. But when Ahasuerus, desiring to show his guests the beauty of his bride, sends for her that she might be exhibited, she refuses to come.

The king’s wrath is great, and consulting his advisers, resolves to depose her: Vashti has disobeyed his orders in not coming into his presence, and so will never do so. Another shall become queen.

Thus begins the search for a new bride for King Ahasuerus. There appears on the scene Mordecai, whose relative Esther was brought up by him as his adopted daughter because she was an orphan. Endowed with great beauty, she is chosen along with other girls to be presented to the king. And it is with her that Ahasuerus falls in love: now Esther becomes the new queen, and in her honor there will be a great feast for 7 days.

Esther goes to court with an attitude of submission: she subjects herself to exhausting preparations with ointments and perfumes, lasting 12 months, before being presented to the king, obeying all that had been requested of her. But in reality, even with such docility, she will be the one to alter the
fate of her people.

It is interesting to examine these different types: Esther, the submissive, and Vashti, the rebel. The latter commits a revolutionary act, which calls into question power and, in refusing to let herself be exhibited, arouses our sympathies. Nonetheless, we cannot read this action in the light of modern or feminist categories. That which Vashti does is presented in the text negatively, as a subversion of the order established by law, even if I think we can see a certain irony in the story: a woman creating turmoil in an empire as gigantic and powerful as that of Persia. Something similar is found in the Exodus account of the midwives in Egypt who refuse to obey Pharaoh’s command, generating difficulties for him with their insurmountable objections: they cannot kill the babies at birth, because by the time they arrive the babies have already been born owing to the great vitality of Jewish women, who are claimed to give birth faster than Egyptians. The mighty Pharaoh, who knows nothing of pregnancy and childbirth, must trust their claims and cancel his order, replacing it with another (cf. Ex 1.15-22).

Vashti does, in any case, play a pivotal role in the story, allowing, by her disobedience, for the introduction of Esther. Something similar happens with the figure of Mordecai, whose refusal to kneel before Haman, the highest dignitary of the court, will cause the plot to develop towards the risk of extermination. But whereas Mordecai’s refusal flows from obedience to God, Vashti’s is a matter of self-assertion.

This opens us to the positivity of Esther, who never displays a spirit of self-assertion, but will be guided instead by a sense of responsibility towards her people; it is this that will be cause for salvation. Esther seems to allow herself to be swallowed up by the system, but in reality she will cause it to burst. This is because the real subversion consists in obedience to God’s plan and in being willing to pursue love even to its extreme consequences. It is in this obedience that Esther was “prepared” for her role as queen, holding this honor in silence.

The story of Esther’s admission to the court insists that she was silent with regard to her Jewish origins (cf. 2:10-20); this makes possible the story’s successive events. The reader, in fact, knows what the king and Haman do not; evil is unaware of the truth, and the latter, in revealing itself, triumphs. But the silence of Esther has another narrative value: in a situation of apparent objectification of the body, in which the protagonist allows herself to be anointed and perfumed for a whole year as a matter of docility, Esther safeguards her identity and, in hiding it from foreigners, manages in
a sense to avoid giving herself totally into their hands. She remains a Jew, faithful to her history and the people to which she belongs. It will be just for the sake of her people, when necessary, that she will be ready even to sacrifice herself.

After a brief insertion of the episode of a plot against the king foiled by Mordecai (cf. 2:21-3), Haman and his inordinate thirst for power are described: everyone had to kneel down and worship before him, but Mordecai refuses. This is not out of pride; as he affirms in his prayer to the Lord, it is so as “not to put the glory of a man above the glory of God” (cf. 4:17d-e).

Haman, discovering that Mordecai is Jewish, decides to take revenge on the entire Jewish people (cf. 3:5-6). This is the perverse dynamic of power, manifesting an absolute disproportion between the supposed offense and the reaction provoked: the decision is taken to cause an entire people to perish because one of them would not kneel.

This is the mystery of a people that possesses not only an ethnic unity but also a profound identity and internal cohesion that is based on the election of God, and where belonging and solidarity among the members are lived to the highest degree. But it is also the mystery of the dynamism of evil and salvation. One is reminded of the words of Paul to the Romans: “if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many” (Rom 5:15); but in the book of Esther the ruin is not on account of a sin, but as a result of a gesture of loyalty to God, the same loyalty which will then save those who had been sentenced to death. We find ourselves confronting the problem of the just one who suffers; Mordecai, on account of just act, must suffer persecution – and with him the whole of his people.

As a result of Haman’s wrangling and false accusations before the king, a decree of extermination is issued, the date being decided by casting lots (Purim: cf. 3:7). King Ahasuerus entrusts the execution of the massacre to Haman himself. Among the charges one finds emphasized the otherness of Israel, portrayed as a danger: Israel is a people whose laws are different from those of others, and which does not keep the edicts of the king. The law of God gives different references, criteria that seem subversive; the system of values changes, and this undermines normal living: “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not for the king’s profit to tolerate them,” says Haman to his sovereign (3:8) and this is strongly reaffirmed in the edict of extermination (see 3:13d-g). Fidelity
to God makes people different, foreign, and, as in this case, subject to elimination.

The reaction of Mordecai and his people is immediate and appropriate to the dramatic situation: clothes torn, sackcloth and ashes, fasting, weeping. They are painful gestures of mourning, with which death is anticipated in life, expressing anguish and pleading with God for liberation from such a tragedy. Israel seems doomed to disappear forever, destined for destruction because of her faithfulness to God. It is not unusual to find in Scripture that belonging to God and receiving his blessing become cause of persecution and death, as in Egypt at the time of the Exodus: the people became numerous, in accordance with the promise made to Abraham, and the blessing of the Lord makes itself visible, but being perceived by others as dangerous, itself generates persecution and a will to annihilation.

The news of the misfortune that has befallen Israel comes to reach even Esther, to whom Mordecai sends a desperate plea for help, asking her to come to the king to intercede for her people: “Remembering the days of your lowliness, when you were cared for by me, because Haman, who is next to the king, spoke against us for our destruction. Beseech the Lord and speak to the king concerning us and deliver us from death” (4:8).

Esther is confronted by a seemingly insurmountable difficulty: no one can enter the presence of the king unless called, the penalty being death. But Mordecai’s response confronts his adopted daughter with truth: “Think not that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:13-14). These are words of suffering, seemingly harsh, but in reality an expression of love. Because love does not manifest itself in a desire for protection which encourages a selfish or cowardly and defeatist attitude; love, even of those who have leadership responsibilities towards others, should help to love, even at risk of life, if needs be.

The way of salvation passes through solidarity, and Esther accepts the words of Mordecai and agrees to perish. She no longer thinks of danger, she no longer seeks to save herself, the salvation of her people is now a priority: “I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish” (4:16).

What is happening in the life of Esther is a conscious acceptance of her history and her identity as the way to discovering her vocation. Esther’s belonging to the Jewish people marks out her destiny: the assumption of the
realization of the body, of its concreteness, of one’s personal history are integral parts of the history of salvation. And now that Israel has reached the moment of peril, Esther regains her own past, a true queen (not of the Persians, but of Israel), and courageously accepting death so that her people can continue to live.

Esther becomes an adult, and expresses her maturity in becoming responsible for the others. She reaches her full personal dimension in this assumption of responsibility, which is both out of obedience to, and in reconciliation with, her own truth. That she is a Jew and is queen of Persia – the two come together to bring about fulfillment in the gift of life, in an authority which is both service and mediation of salvation.

Even for Moses, the authoritative guide of Israel in its founding moment, things were like this: he was divided between the two peoples, the son of a Jewish mother and raised by an Egyptian mother, possessing and enduring a secret identity, in a situation of extermination. Both Moses and Esther at the court of the Gentiles, and absorbed by Gentiles in positions of power. And while there, called to recognize their actual origins. They find themselves confronted by violence (Esther knows the extermination desired by Haman, and Moses witnesses the cruelty mistreatment of a Jew by an Egyptian), but Moses reacts with violence and kills the Egyptian, whereas Esther instead accepts the possibility of death. Both are afraid (Moses flees, Esther faints before the king), and in front of the prospect of facing the dangerous sovereign, even Moses, like Esther, objected, but he too then agrees to go, assuming exposure to death as part of the road of obedience to God. Both are equipped with a beauty that promotes life: Moses is beautiful, and so the mother does not allow him to perish, and Esther is beautiful, and as a consequence Ahasuerus does not sentence her to death. Finally, in both cases, a mystery of fertility and maternity is unfolded: Moses, the little one sentenced to death, taken up by Pharaoh’s daughter thus making herself his mother (she who had no milk with which to feed a baby), and Esther, who will become in a real sense the mother of the people (witness true royalty) when she is willing to die for them.

In the Greek text, before Esther presents herself before the king, we are given the prayers of Mordecai and his adopted daughter (cf. 4:17a-z): facing death, they turn to the God of life imploring that they be saved. This is not to say that he abdicates his own initiative and declines to makes use of the available resources (Esther is still the queen, which puts her in a position of privilege which might be very useful), but always action is undertaken in the certainty that only God can come in and effect liberation, even if through mediation. It is the difficult balance between personal
efforts and abandonment to the Lord, a continuous test for every believer. And prayer is the synthesis: man is in play and motivates himself, asking all the while that it be God to advance God’s plan of salvation.

In the prayer of Esther there is a great deal of anguish, and marked gestures of penance and mourning: she takes off her regalia and takes upon herself the signs of impending death. Esther gets ready to perish, but asks to be freed; the request for help is pathetic and urgent, emphasizing her mortal danger and solitude. The Queen confesses her weakness and her own helplessness; God has to be moved to pity and intervene.

She reminds the Lord his reality as the faithful God who chose Israel, and so cannot allow that “the mouths should be closed who praise Him.” Esther therefore asks God to save; she is going into the lair of the “lion” and repeats that she is alone, and that only God can help. Loneliness often accompanies the service of authority, but those who are called know that the Lord does not abandon.

And then Esther reminds God of her own faithfulness: she has not contaminated herself, she has only suffered, despising it, her status as queen among the Gentiles. She remained faithful to the divine decision and the diversity it entailed. And now she asks the Lord to manifest Himself for what He is: the God of Abraham, who liberates and saves.

In prayer, even in anguish, there is present and unshaken an awareness and confidence of being heard by God. Esther has God alone, and God cannot abandon her. With this force alone, that of faith, Esther goes to meet her fate.

When our protagonist presents herself before the king, she does so displaying all her beauty but also her weakness. Esther is afraid of the reaction of the powerful and angry sovereign; excitement and fear for her very life are the forces that have the upper hand. Her strength weakened, she faints. But God, as the Greek text tells us, “changed the spirit of the king to gentleness,” which immediately calms his anger, and out of concern for the health of his wife he assures her that she will not suffer consequences for her actions and will not die (cf. 5:1a-f).

In Esther who, though beset by fear, is ready to lay down his life for her people, there is manifested the meaning of true kingship: intercession and a taking upon oneself of the pain of others is are shown to be essential components of real authority. Esther risks her life because she has taken upon herself the suffering of the people to which she belongs and for which she feels responsible. The exercise of power is a service brought “to the end” (cf. Jn 13:1).
Even in this, as we mentioned before, the figure of Esther can be compared to that of Moses, who also agree to present himself before Pharaoh and in so doing ran the risk of dying. Doing this he became the leader and guide of Israel, a privileged mediation in the relationship with God.

As for Esther, she faints again (see 5:2a-b); she is queen, but she is crushed by the weight that she must carry, and shows it in her “becoming less”. Weakness need not be a source of fear, and even those who have authority should not be afraid to admit it. This time it is Ahasuerus, yet more upset before his fainted bride, who offers to give her whatever she wants, even half of his kingdom.

But Esther’s demand is infinitely more modest: she asks only that the king, together with Haman, take part in a banquet. Then, during the banquet, when Ahasuerus reiterates the proposal to give her everything she wants, she still requires another banquet the next day, with the king and Haman.

The reader, at this point, is puzzled: what is Esther waiting for? Why not openly addresses the problem? Is she delaying the moment of her real demand because she is afraid to reveal herself as belonging to the people of Israel out of fear of the reactions of her two guests? Or does she have her own plan, and is she waiting for the right moment in an exercise of “prudential” authority?

The reader must wait patiently for the story to answer her questions, and in the meantime the narrative focuses on Haman, who does not wait and comes to hasty conclusions, having interpreted in a positive way Esther’s request: sure, he thinks, and announces to his family and friends, the invitation of the queen addressed only to him and the king is a sign of great respect and honor, and if that Mordecai persists in not wanting to kneel before him, he will get what he deserves: on the advice of his wife and friends, he causes a gallows to be prepared on which the insolent rebel might be hanged, so that he might go “merrily with the king to the dinner” (5:14). Power makes men cruel; Haman wants the extermination of all the Jews and also wants to anticipate the death of Mordecai, on the gallows prepared for him.

But God’s plans are different: Ahasuerus that night, sleepless, asks to be read again the chronicles of the kingdom. And in them, it is reported that Mordecai foiled the plot against the king, who then decides to pay tribute to the one who saved his life, the very Mordecai, who, unbeknownst to the king, has already had a gallows of death prepared for him. The biblical message is comforting: good that is done, sooner or later, becomes salvation
for self and others.

And indeed, Ahasuerus seeks the counsel of Haman, who in the meantime had come to court, on what should be done to a man to whom the king wishes to honor. Haman does not know (but the reader does) that the man whom the king is referring to is Mordecai, and thinks that he is the one whom the king wishes to honor. Moreover, on two occasions he has been privileged guest at the feast of the queen and so now expects further manifestations of favor. Thus, responding to Ahasuerus, he articulates his dream of triumph: wearing a royal robe, and with a crown on his head, being processed on a royal horse through the streets of the city while before him a shout goes up: “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor” (cf. 6:7-10). Power not only makes men cruel, but also a bit stupid: to concentrate one’s desire for power and self-realization in the fact of being carried around dressed as a king is disconcerting folly. The story is ironic, even caricatured, and even more so when what the reader already knew is revealed to Haman: the whole exhibition of pomp and glory is for Mordecai, not for Haman. He had come to the palace to ask the king to hang Mordecai, and instead now it is he who must bear in triumph the one who was supposed to have been his victim.

Then, during the second banquet willed by Esther, when she denounces Haman’s evil plan to exterminate all the Jews, it is the end for the persecutor (cf. 7:1-6). The king is incensed, goes out into the garden, and Haman, terrified and aware that his downfall is now certain, begs and begs the queen Esther for mercy, allowing himself to fall on the couch on which she is sitting. But his gesture is misunderstood; power makes men unable to humble themselves, and when the powerful and proud Haman asks for grace and prostrates himself, it appears as an act of violence. The king, returning to the room, sees him and screams, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” (7:8).

For Haman it is the time of reckoning: the gallows which was to have served for the death of Mordecai is instead destined for him. Now, the plot of the story goes to the expected conclusion: the extermination decree is revoked, the people of Israel is saved and the attackers are annihilated. The feast of Purim will serve to remind, from generation to generation, Israel of the salvation wrought by the Lord in a game of masks and role reversal, in which the persecutors are defeated and those who were sentenced to death can celebrate the restoration of life.

“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has
sent empty away”, as the little Virgin of Nazareth will sing in the Magnificat (Lk 1:52 to 53, cf. Also 1 Samuel 2:4-8), celebrating the reversal of fortunes so typical of divine interventions of salvation.

Thus Esther, a queen marked by a radical weakness which was nonetheless turned into overwhelming force in her decision to lay down her life for her people, comes to serve as an exemplary figure of authority that is exercised in full service. An authority that is not the power of the leaders of the nations that dominate and oppress, according to the Gospel words quoted at the beginning of this paper. True authority is service exercised in meekness, humility, love that leads to self-giving. True authority is that of the Lord and Master who became a servant, washing the disciples’ feet and so signifying the gift of his life (cf. Jn 13:1-17); true power is that of the “Good Shepherd” who offers the life for the flock that was entrusted to him (cf. Jn 10:11-18).

This is “the service of authority” which is asked of you. Because the rulers of the nations govern according to another logic of power, but “among you it must not be so.”
GRACED COMPANIONSHIP: A METAPHOR FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP TODAY

Sr. Mary Pat Garvin, RSM, Ph.D.

Sister Mary Pat Garvin is a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Americas. She has been an educator since 1974 at the primary, secondary, and university levels. She received her doctorate in psychology from the Gregorian University, Rome, and was on the Institute of Psychology faculty at the same university from 1994 to 2001. Currently, Mary Pat works as a counselor and teaches at Creighton University and Seton Hall University. She also ministers in Europe and North America as an educator and consultant for religious congregations in the area of initial and ongoing formation.

Original in English

1. Introduction

Good morning! Thank you for your warm welcome. I am delighted to be with you today and I thank the UISG for their invitation to participate in this Plenary Assembly. For the past two days we have immersed ourselves in our theme: “‘It will not be so among you’: The Service of Leadership according to the Gospel.” Our prayer, ritual, table conversations and the wisdom shared by Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB and Prof. Bruna Costacurta have enriched us and hopefully challenged us to deepen our commitment to the service of leadership which has been entrusted to us by our congregations!

This morning I invite us to enter into an exploration of “Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today.” Using the metaphor of “graced companionship” we will explore how the mission of leadership today, is and always has been about taking on of the mind and heart of Jesus; thus leading our congregations as Jesus led his disciples — as a graced companion!
2. Graced Companions

Jesus was a graced companion *par excellence!* He was a transformational leader\(^1\) who offered vision, energy, challenge and courage to those attracted to his own way of being *with* and ministering *to* God’s people.

Likewise, the history of our own congregations is rich with legions of wise women, graced companions, transformational leaders who, following the example of Jesus accompanied the Sisters of their times with vision, energy, challenge and courage as they ministered to God’s people. We need only to think about women such as of Teresa of Avila, Frances Cabrini, Mary Ward, Catherine McAuley, Alphonse Maria Eppinger, Mother Teresa and many more!

Today, I stand before this gathering of graced companions. Wise women, transformational leaders of congregations worldwide who have internalized, absorbed and imbibed Jesus’ way of being so deeply that despite any political turmoil in our countries, disillusionment with our Church, and for some but not all diminishment in membership, continue to exercise leadership as graced companions; animating your Sisters with the vision, energy, challenge and courage they need this very day to minister to God’s people.

As we explore graced companionship this morning I suggest two ways of engaging our topic. First, I invite all of us to “listen with the ear of our heart.”\(^2\) That is, listen not only to the presentation but listen as intently to yourself; your emotions, thoughts, memories, questions, doubts, and even resistances that will arise within you during the next hour. These insights, shimmers of light are the connections you are making with your own experience of leadership. It is these connections that will endure long after the words of this morning’s presentation fade away.

Secondly, I suggest that we keep the following questions in mind.\(^3\) These questions will shape our conversations later this morning.

- What *offered me energy* and *insight* during our exploration of Graced Companionship?
- What *challenged me* beyond my current thinking/understanding about leadership?
- What did I find myself *resisting*? Any clues to why?
- What will I *take-away and use* in my service of leadership in the next few weeks and months?
3. “It shall not be so among you.” (Mt. 20:26)

Biblical scholars tell us that the Gospel of Matthew, perhaps more than the other three gospel accounts, focuses most frequently on the words and sayings of Jesus. By recounting as closely as possible Jesus’ words Matthew attempts to draw us into the scene depicted in the Gospel.

In Matthew 20:26 we read, “It shall not be so among you.” Entering into this passage we find ourselves walking alongside Jesus and the disciples as they journey towards Jerusalem. Not unlike experiences in our own life, Jesus is confronted with the disciples arguing over places of honor and power in the group. Probably after having worked through some of his own agitation and disappointment with this type of behavior, Jesus uses this most human of situations as a teachable moment saying, “You know how those who exercise authority among the Gentiles lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It shall not be so among you.” (Mt. 20:26).

No one in Jesus’ day would have missed the point Jesus was making. The abuse of authority and power by leaders in the ancient world, secular and religious alike was all too familiar to the people of Jesus’ time. In contrast, Jesus’ words and ways of relating to the disciples modeled a new way of leading – a way I name as graced companionship. Over the next three years Jesus accompanied the disciples as a graced companion. Whether preaching, healing or enjoying a good meal with his friends Jesus modeled a new way of leading; one he hoped would replace the disciples’ experience of absolute and unbridled authority and power.

To be a graced companion, to relate to our members as Jesus related to the disciples so as to promote God’s dream, God’s reign — this has been the enduring commitment of our congregations. In season and out, we and those graced companions who have gone before us have labored to continue the mission of Jesus. For over fourteen centuries guided by prayerful consideration of the needs of the times, the charisms of our institutes and the pastoral priorities of the universal and local church, our congregations have heeded the call of Jesus to proclaim the gospel in word and deed.

Today more than ever there is renewed interest in exploring leadership’s potential to promote and sustain our congregations’ commitment to our founding charism and values. Our congregations worldwide, along with national and international conferences of religious, such as the UISG,
have dedicated themselves to exploring what makes leadership effective, capable of following the Spirit’s lead, in the evolving nature of religious life in the world today. So let us turn our attention to some of the research into both the art and science of leadership; seeking wisdom as we explore how to lead more fully as Jesus led – as a graced companion.

4. The Challenge to Graced Companionship in our Post-Modern World

To formulate a definition of leadership in our post-modern world is not an easy task. Studies in the field of leadership and leadership development tell us that “like love, leadership continues to be something everyone knows exists but nobody can define.” Nevertheless, these studies as well as your own experience attest to the fact that “leadership is a real phenomenon and it always and everywhere makes a difference.”

In these challenging years at the beginning of the 21st century, desiring to lead as Jesus led we ask ourselves:

· What type of leadership best enlightens our understanding of graced companionship?

· How does graced companionship promote and sustain in our members the founding charism, values, and commitment of the congregation?

· Where can leaders and members alike access their “glorious history” and move confidently into the future, steeped in the Spirit and ready to meet the challenges of our own day with the wisdom and depth of imagination of our founders and foundresses?

To respond adequately to these questions would take more time than we have this morning. However, permit me to begin by saying just a few words about two elements of a type of leadership capable of enlightening our understanding of graced companionship.

First, to lead as a graced companion we must believe in earnest that leadership is first and foremost about relationship! Secondly, graced companions recognize that leadership is a communal and shared venture. Let’s explore these two critical elements in more depth.

5. Graced Companionship’s Relational Quality

According to key researchers in the field of leadership and leadership development, the primary and most profound characteristic of leadership is its relational quality. Prior to the mid-20th century studies into what
made an effective leader focused almost primarily on identifying an individual’s traits, behaviors and personality patterns. These elements would then be used to gauge the probability of future effectiveness as a leader. Since then further research, in particular research of an interdisciplinary nature,\(^\text{12}\) has recognized that effective leaders possess a heightened capacity for mature, healthy (that is holy!) relationships with others. Thus, interpersonal intelligence\(^\text{13}\) as some refer to it is the first and foremost quality of an effective leader, a leader capable of graced companionship.

To emphasize just how critical a person’s interpersonal intelligence is to being a graced companion studies in this field contend that leadership is best understood as a \textit{process} that resides \textit{neither} in an individual leader \textit{nor} in the position itself. Rather, leadership is the dynamic relationship created and nourished between leaders and members.\(^\text{14}\)

Long have we recognized the interpersonal intelligence of Jesus – though we may not have called it that. For example, flowing from his profound-yet-ever-developing knowledge and acceptance of self Jesus’ capacity for graced companionship was evident in his ability to create and nourish deep and lasting bonds with others; bonds which we know from Scripture not even death could destroy. Jesus likewise maintained healthy and holy ways of relating despite, at times, the presence of conflict. As noted in the Gospels on more than one occasion Jesus was able to intuit the emotions, thoughts, desires and aspirations of others in part because he was so attuned to his own interior life.

Perhaps during a quiet moment in the next few days or on your long or not-so-long journey back home you might ponder and muse on your own interpersonal intelligence, your own capacity to relate to others in a mature, healthy and holy manner. How does your capacity for relationship enhance your ability to lead as Jesus led – to be a graced companion? Where might you need to strengthen your own interpersonal intelligence so as to lead more credibly as a graced companion?

\section*{6. Graced Companionship as Communal and Shared}

Our exploration of graced companionship is enhanced further as we consider the second critical element of leadership: namely, effective leadership today is leadership that is communal and shared. Leadership as communal and shared goes far beyond how we relate to our current councils or leadership teams. Leadership as communal and shared is all about generativity!\(^\text{15}\) It is about providing for our members what they
need to develop their own capacities for leadership, be it leaders of our ministries and/or as future leaders of our congregations. As the human sciences have shown us, generativity is trans-cultural and trans-historical. That is, in every culture and throughout all time the central task, the central project of adulthood has always been and always will be about being generative! Having a life-giving concern about the future – whether it be the future of one’s own family or the future of one’s own congregation lies at the very core of what it means to be a mature, healthy and holy adult. Generativity calls us daily to involve ourselves in that innate movement within us, that most human of journeys; the movement from self-fulfillment to self-transcendence. That is, as leaders we evaluate each encounter with an individual Sister, local community or congregational decision whether large or small, in light of the future of our congregations; while never forgetting that the future begins now!

Applying this to leadership and leadership development we see that it is precisely through relationships created and nourished between leaders and members that generativity is unleashed and the charism is quickened. Mentored, challenged and guided by graced companions members engage in the hard work of personal development and the development of skills necessary to become effective leaders. Furthermore, as members experience their own leaders as graced companions, be it on the local, provincial or congregational level, they may begin to envision themselves as graced companions capable of leading ministries and the congregation into the future. Thus we see how generativity lives at the very core of congregational leadership and that “leaders create other leaders, and it is in this fashion that leadership becomes a shared and communal process.”

Here again I invite you to create a few moments to ponder and muse on how you are generative as a leader? How do you as a graced companion provide for members the opportunities to be mentored, challenged and guided as they develop both personally and professionally, ready to lead your ministries and congregation into the future?

7. Graced Companionship and Storytelling

Over the past twenty years I have been blessed with the wonderful opportunity to work with many of you and your congregations throughout Europe, Africa, North and South America. My first request of any leadership team or council is to borrow a copy of your congregational
history – your story, a copy of your Constitutions and the most recent Chapter Declaration or Chapter Statement. These documents contain the unique story of how graced companionship between leaders and members has continued to birth the Incarnation, God-with-us, at a particular time and in a particular culture. I have noted that as leaders we do not misunderstand the importance of the stories and documents of our congregations, but sometimes we under-understand them and how they can be used to enhance our graced companionship. Let me offer an example.

As leaders of congregations, we are charged with animating our members and equipping them to animate each other in the following of Jesus in the tradition of our founders or foundresses. The stories contained in our histories, the values proclaimed in our Constitutions and the contemporary expression of those values, hopefully found in our most recent Chapter Statements are the most potent means we have of tapping directly into the deepest desires and highest aspirations of our members; those same desires and aspirations that first ignited their religious vocations.

Jesus understood well the power of narrative and storytelling to ignite action on behalf of God’s dream! In the Gospels we see Jesus frequently taping into the disciples’ desires and aspirations by linking their daily experiences to the stories contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. In our own day our congregational archives are home to thousands of narratives and stories just waiting to be told and re-told releasing once again the energy and vision of our founding members. But perhaps much dearer to our hearts and our own experience is the congregational storytelling that goes on both formally and informally in a countless number of ways such as: at receptions, professions, jubilees and perhaps most poignantly, at the funerals of our Sisters where through story we recount and rejoice in the charism-made-flesh.

“Memory releases energy for discipleship.” As we search for a symbol for Chapter, an image for an accountability report at the end of a leadership team’s term of office, or a letter to the congregation on a difficult topic – do we give preference to a symbol, story, or “quotable quote” of the founder or foundress? Our congregational symbols are the most direct route to the hearts and minds of our members. Our congregational stories release energy for discipleship and ignite in our own day action on behalf of God’s dream.

I can think of no better example of the power of memory to release energy for discipleship than a short segment of a letter taken from my
own congregational history. Sisters of Mercy here present will recognize this frequently recounted story. I invite all of us to listen thoughtfully and call to mind a similar story within your own tradition.

Catherine McAuley, an Irish woman, founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831. One of her first and closest collaborators was a young woman named Fanny Warde. In a letter dated 1879 Sr. Frances Warde wrote:

\[\text{You never knew her [Catherine McAuley]. I knew her better than I have known anybody in my life. She was a woman of God and God made her a woman of vision. She showed me what it meant to be a Sister of Mercy, to see the world and its people in terms of God’s love; to love everyone who needed love, to care for everyone who needed care. Now her vision is driving me on. It is a glorious thing to be a Sister of Mercy.}^{19}\]

This letter written a full thirty-eight years after Catherine’s death shows the power of memory and the generative power of a relationship grounded in graced companionship. The influence Catherine had on Frances was strong and deep and withstood the test of time, withstood even death itself! Perhaps less readily recognized, though of equal importance, was Frances Warde’s own capacity to internalize Catherine’s vision, consequently becoming a graced companion herself to the thousands of Sisters of Mercy who would come after her.

Each of your congregational histories contains stories such as the generative relationship between Catherine McAuley and Frances Warde. It is through the telling and re-telling of stories like this one that we make available to our members the power and influence of these wise women, these graced companions and transformational leaders who have gone before us! Accessing our past through story has the potential of releasing incredible energy in our Sisters as they go about doing the works of mercy which are the works of God!

Let me be clear! We do not recount our congregational stories in order to suggest a return to the past; nor do we recount our stories in order to simply admire those who have gone before us. Rather, our storytelling releases the memory of the wise women, graced companions, transformational leaders who have preceded us. Their stories draw us more closely into the communion of saints and then push us out into our own post-modern times making it possible for us to act with their wisdom and depth of imagination.
How have you and your council or leadership team employed your own congregational stories and documents as a means of releasing your Sisters’ energy for discipleship? How has your graced companionship of your members been enhanced by tapping into their deepest desire and highest aspirations as they continue to do the works of mercy which are the works of God?

8. Graced Companionship: An Experience of Weî-jî

Though most of us do not speak Mandarin we would probably agree that congregational leadership is often an experience of weî-jî; that is, an experience of crisis comprised of both ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity!’ I know that there are a few of you here this morning who know Mandarin and perhaps the heated debate that rages within the field of linguistics over its exact translation, I want to focus our attention only on the reality that every crisis we experience holds out to us both ‘danger’ as well as ‘opportunity.’ We do not choose which crises we encounter as leaders; we can and must choose the stance we take before them!

The truth is that each of us, in a single day, finds ourselves working on many fronts. For example, in the morning you are attempting to navigate the political landscape of a country where you hope to open a new mission. In the afternoon you find yourself once again endeavoring to re-establish a respectful and mutually beneficial dialogue with a Bishop or other ecclesial authority who questions your leadership or your Sisters’ ministering within a diocese. And all the while, you and your council or leadership team are “on call” to be graced companions for the members of your congregation. Whether through personal contact, phone calls, letters, and yes, in our own day – even through YouTube videos, emails, texts and “tweets” you are charged, even as you deal with the crises before you, with animating your membership with the vision, energy, challenge and courage needed to minister to God’s people.

Although, we are often aware of the ‘danger’ that such constant and many times, soul-wrenching work takes on us spiritually, emotionally, relationally and physically, we sometimes find it difficult to live well the years spent in congregational leadership. The dangers of burnout and the more common experience of “brownout” have been brought to our attention not only by counselors and psychologists but spiritual writers as well! Caring for our spiritual, emotional, relational and physical health is a good in itself; but it is also; let us not forget, in service of carrying out the mission of leadership that has been entrusted to us.
Graced companionship demands that leaders know and practice ways to maintain their health and stamina in all areas of life. Two effective means often employed by congregational leaders are 1) committing oneself daily to times of prayer, reflection and solitude, and 2) seeking, finding and maintaining an ongoing and in-depth relationship with a spiritual director, counselor, wisdom figure or supervisor. These two practices are spiritually as well as psychologically valuable. Each offers to us a relationship and safe-enough space where our joys and hopes, disillusionments and betrayals which are part-and-parcel of the experience of leadership may be prayed through and explored with another.

I have long been nourished by the verse from the Book of Proverbs which reminds us that we come to know ourselves in the other. Whether in prayer, spiritual direction, or supervision, we as leaders are offered the chance to gain clarity and vision for ourselves and our congregation. And although I do not believe that connecting by phone or the internet (e.g. Skype) is the best way to avail oneself of these means, I have worked enough with some of your congregations and communities in developing nations to state firmly that if this is the only way to find and maintain an on-going relationship with a counselor or supervisor it should be encouraged and provided.

The second element of every wei-jī, of every crisis is the ‘opportunity’ it offers for the birthing of something new, something more. Our congregational histories are replete with graced companions, transformational leaders who in the midst of crisis were able to ignite the spiritual and psychic energy of their members in service of the charism. We are called in our own day to do no less! As graced companions we must “read the signs of the times” and offer practical and contemporary interpretations of our charisms. Likewise we are called to challenge our membership to faithfulness and promote suitable adaptation and renewal of community life and ministry, all the while providing vision and inspiration to our members as we live into an unknown future.

Our congregations yearn for leaders who will point to the future ready to follow the Spirit’s lead. Though our way of living and ministering may look different from the past, our dedication to the founding vision of our congregations is to endure! Our capacity as graced companions to lead in these uncertain times (which, in reality, has been true of all times!) will be enhanced by the following. First, to have a sense of “at-homeness” with ourselves and a concomitant capacity for healthy (and remember this means holy!) relationships with others demonstrated in being approachable, flexible, and dialogic while remaining committed...
to the founding charism and values of the congregation. This in turn will facilitate a proficiency in enabling and encouraging members to draw upon their own resources; thus becoming graced companions for others.

Secondly, leaders must have the capacity to be “critical realists.” That is, to look reality in the face and communicate joyful hope. This capacity is strengthened by the courage to act in spite of obstacles whether they are political, ecclesial, or arise from within our own congregations. Thirdly, the capacity to articulate the charism in fresh and compelling ways despite the shifting and complex times we find ourselves in, both in our world and in our Church. And lastly, our capacity to be attentive to the mystery of God wherever, whenever and however God chooses to make God’s self known.

I am under no illusion of the enormity of this task. Graced companionship asks everything of us! It is at times like these that I call on the graced companionship of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, former archbishop of the city of Chicago. At the 1994 Synod on Consecrated Life he reminded all of us that “we live in a time of crisis [a time of weî-jî] for the Consecrated Life, but also a time of creativity. It is a time of crisis because of the deep tensions affecting society and the Church […]. It is a time of creativity, as all times of crisis are, because the Holy Spirit seems to be particularly active in times of transitions.”

9. Graced Companionship and Power

We close our exploration this morning with a few reflections on the use power as a graced companion. Because power is often used to oppress rather than empower we frequently experience ‘power’ as a scary word. Scary words are defined as those words for which we have an inadequate understanding; words which provoke in us an unsettling emotional response.

As graced companions we cannot afford that ‘power’ is a scary word! In Matthew 20:26 we see Jesus not abolishing the need for authority and power; but rather recasting these human dynamics so as to ignite and release energy in service of the Gospel.

The human sciences, in particular psychology and sociology understand power as influence. When we have power, we have influence. Likewise, when we have influence we have power! Our following of Jesus and adopting his way of leading demands that we name, claim and employ the power and influence we hold as congregational leaders. Perhaps, the
challenge before us is to be alert and ready to employ the many unsung types of power that we have at our disposal each and every day. For example:

- **The power of encouragement**: at this very moment, somewhere on this planet, there is a member of your congregation or a local or provincial leader who is struggling. Perhaps this Sister is experiencing an onslaught of doubts regarding her vocation or the wisdom of an important decision she had to make during the past week. Recognize the power of encouragement that you possess! Your encouragement, not an answer to her doubts or struggles, has the power to release the much needed energy, vision and courage she may need this very day to look reality in the face and remain hopeful.

- **The power of hospitality**: many congregations claim hospitality as a hallmark of their charism. As we know being hospitable goes far beyond welcoming someone into our homes and convents. Imagine the power you possess to ignite the spiritual and psychic energy of your members by being hospitable to new ideas regardless of who in the congregation offers them!\(^{26}\) Though not all new ideas will bear fruit a hospitable attitude signals to the membership that all are called to participate in designing how the congregation will continue to minister to God’s people.

- **The power of resilience**: resilience if often described as the space and time between disappointment and recommitment, between sorrow and healing, and between offense and forgiveness. Recognize and claim the power of resilience in your own life!\(^{27}\) Replenish your own spiritual, emotional, relational and physical needs so as to have the energy to be generative, able to act with the courage and the depth of imagination so needed in religious leadership today.

The power of encouragement, hospitality, and resilience are just three of the literally hundreds of types of power we possess; power that is influential in sustaining our membership as they continue to do the works of mercy, which are the works of God!

**10. Conclusion**

Catherine McAuley, foundress of my congregation, was probably like your founders and foundresses — an eminently practical person! The early Sisters of Mercy in Ireland remembered Catherine encouraging them to “try and resemble Jesus in some one thing at least.”\(^{28}\) This morning we have explored how we might deepen our own resemblance
to Jesus in some one thing at least; becoming or strengthening our capacity to be graced companions offering vision, energy, challenge and courage to our Sisters as they minister this very day to God’s people.

Jesus was clear when he confronted the abuse of authority and power so prevalent among leaders in the ancient world, secular and religious alike. Noticing these same attitudes in the disciples he was firm, “It shall not be so among you.” Jesus went on to model a type of leadership that was highly relational and generative. He gained ready access to the disciples’ courage and imagination by linking their present experiences to the past and through memory released their energy for discipleship.

Jesus lived the healthy rhythm of contemplation and action. Centered in God and nourished through his times of prayer, solitude, and table fellowship with friends he maintained his ability to confront crises and not crumble; to look reality in the face and communicate hope to his followers. He likewise used his power and influence not to oppress but to empower those willing to further God’s reign, God’s dream.

As graced companions, transformational leaders of congregations worldwide may we go forth from this Plenary Assembly ever more confident that our mission of leadership, modeled on that of Jesus, will support and sustain our Sisters as they continue to minister to God’s people in fresh and compelling ways. This is the leadership to which we are called. Thank you.


6 Leadership, an elusive concept, has been studied for thousands of years. In the last fifty years leadership has been examined intensely. Extensive research by sociologist, organizational psychologists, and educators to name just a few, has yielded no less than 350 different definitions. A cursory survey of books on leadership written in English presently on the market nets more than 150,000 titles.


11 Foster, 1989, 51.


14 Foster, 1989, 52.

15 Foster, 1989, 53.

16 A new venture in leadership development is the Collaborative Leadership Development Program (CLDP). This program is a multi-congregational, multinational, multi-faceted learning experience for members (under 60) of religious congregations based in the United States. For more information about CLDP contact Kathy Wade at kwade42@gmail.com.
Foster, 1989, 57.


Robert Wicks, *Bounce: Living the Resilient Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). “Brown-outs” are understood as those moments of mental and emotional fatigue that frequently fuel unhealthy self-doubt, draining us of the confidence we need to minister as leaders in our congregations.

This section draws on *Dimensions of Leadership: Capacities, Skills and Competencies for Effective Leadership* (Silver Spring, MD: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1997).


EXERCISING AUTHORITY IN AN ADULT COMMUNITY

Sr. Charlotte Sumbamanu, STCJ of Kinshasa

Sr. Charlotte Sumbamanu is a General Superior of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus of Kinshasa.

Licenced in social communication, Sr. Charlotte actively participated as Administrative Manager for programs.

Original in French

Introduction

Several sociological models of government have often influenced the exercise of ecclesial and religious authority. One need only think of the Roman family, monarchies, feudal bonds, and Napoleonic discipline.

The modern person is marked by a breathtaking evolution predisposing her to adopt the new ways of existing and living in this changing world. Globalization makes of our world a “a global village”, largely due to the spectacular advances of new information and communication technologies. Consequently it imposes its own culture, its own mentality. This is why one even speaks of a new world ethic. That has a not negligible importance, not only in the world, but also in the Church and in consecrated life in particular.

Out of this new culture we see new concepts emerge, such as those of shared responsibility, equality, autonomy, sustainable development, cultural diversity, quality of life, sexual orientation, risk-free abortion, same-sex parenthood, the right to choose death, non-governmental organizations, civil society, partnership, consensus, win-win, etc. ¹

Not only do these concepts express debatable aspirations but they also express the most serious deviations of a permissive ideology, in complete opposition to Judeo-Christian values, namely truth, morals, conscience,
Exercising Authority in an Adult Community

Charlotte Sumbamanu, STCJ of Kinshasa

will, family, virginity, chastity, authority, hierarchy, justice, sin, enemy, etc. This resonates with our theme in the substitution of concepts such as moderation/support/coordination instead of authority and equality in place of hierarchy.

"Moreover, one observes that "the manner of perceiving and living authority and obedience has changed, whether it is in the Church or in society. This is due, among other things, to the awareness of the value of each individual person, with her calling and her intellectual, emotional and spiritual gifts, with her liberty and capacity for interpersonal relations; to the central position of the spirituality of communion ², emphasizing the tools that help us live it in a way that is different from and less individualistic in understanding its mission, in sharing with all the People of God and with the forms consistent with tangible cooperation"³. This state of things is supported by the “culture” of Western societies, heavily centered on the individual and her autonomy.

One understands the relevance of reflecting anew on the exercise of authority in an adult community. Our intervention, entitled "The Exercise of Authority in an Adult Community", is centered on three points, which are:

1. The concept of authority in the Church
2. The foundation of authority and its necessity
3. An image of an adult community and its interpretation

1. The Concept of Authority in the Church

1.1 Elucidation of the concepts of authority and obedience

Authority corresponds to the ability to command and be obeyed ⁴. It implies the concepts of legitimacy of power, of command and of obedience. It is not to be confused with authoritarianism. This means that the exercise of authority implies that obedience is vitally important. This is why the terms obedience and authority correlate with one another ⁴. Between these two terms, authority and obedience, there is the command. From this flows the model: authority-command-obedience.

The term authority evokes power or domination. Authority is defined as the “capacity to exercise an influence on other persons, respecting the norms established and shared with them”⁵; while according to Max Weber, the authority of an individual over another rests on legitimacy. It underlines the different sources of legitimacy, those corresponding to the character of
an authority which is accepted and recognized by the governed. The same author considers Power as ‘any opportunity to cause one’s own will to triumph, at the heart of a social relationship, even against resistance, no matter on what this opportunity rests’. According to J.M. DENQUIN, to have power, one must know how to command, to be respected and to be obeyed.

The ecclesiology of communion of Vatican Council II brought about a new vision of authority, of community, of the subject and of obedience. Thus today we insist on the terms: superior, moderator, person-in-charge, coordinator… on the one hand, and personality, conscience, autonomy, conformity to the common good and responsibility… on the other.

In the governance of the Church, one gladly resorts to the terms: subsidiarity, collegiality, coresponsibility, pluralism and community. Poorly understood, these terms are confused with independence, democracy (government of the people) and above all anarchy and lawlessness.

From what is said above we can then say that authority corresponds to a recognized value, which is attributed or conferred; it differs then from authoritarianism. Authority is linked to legitimacy, and the person who exercises it is expected to abide by the norms established and respected by all. While authoritarianism resorts to power, to domination, indeed to hegemony, it can be exercised without the consent of the subjects. In the religious context, it is appropriately: to underline that authority is power used for the good of others, in short, their sanctification.

To obey is to submit to someone by conforming to what that person orders or forbids; it means bending to the will of others, as a child obeys his/her parents, the subject his lord, the individual the law. This then seems to indicate that, in any form of social organization, there exist relationships of authority, and that the establishment of this authority is expressly or tacitly accepted by the various parties. Obedience would consist of adhering to the values communicated by those in authority; this is the attitude of a mature or adult person, because it is not a matter of surrendering her person and her will, but to be raised up in the pursuit of these values.

This involves a great deal of willpower that one can only be found among persons who are free, capable of understanding, of choosing and of wanting, and who are mature enough to accept in an unconstrained and responsible manner the norms of community life (in a society) in the ungrudging exercise of their own duties and in respect of the rights of others.
Obedience, in its natural and purely human dimension, is the act of an intelligent and free person who says yes to an arrangement recognized as acceptable (valid) and accepted in practice by society. It is the capacity of an adult to assume with full knowledge her proper task and proper role at the heart of a community.

As for the command, it is the action of a person who commands, that is to say, who gives an order. In the framework of authority, the command is necessary and legitimate as long as the people recognize the rationale for the order received (e.g. planning, dialogue, preparations, implementation, etc.); they accept and obey.

Submission, according to the New Testament, “is an attitude which consists of voluntarily yielding to the guidance or the exhortation of another person, an attitude of cooperation with another. In fact, submission does not mean letting oneself be controlled or dominated, but an attitude which involves yielding to others to the extent that they reflect the thinking of the Lord”⁹. Obedience in this sense does not end with submission, but with the person who issues orders and with whom one enters into a relationship. When this interpersonal relationship is reached, obedience becomes an attitude of love, the attitude typical of a Christian.

2. The Foundation of Authority and its Necessity

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Sacred Scriptures take on the character of the full moral authority that God exercises over God’s creatures¹⁰. Thus this reality reveals to us that the Lord, our God, possesses an unshakeable authority.

2.1 The Foundation of Authority

“All authority comes from God” (Romans 13:1), for the service and in the spirit of truth. Besides, in the story of the Sons of Zebedee, Jesus trashes the worldly mentality characterized by power and domination. He recommends a new state of spirit, such as: “but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave”; (Mt 20:26). In this world, leaders work on the basis of a socio-political structure, a hierarchy assuring them the obedience of their orders, and which is thus the basis of their power. In the Kingdom of God, authority comes from childlike humility and devoted service. Among the Pagans, authority is based on position and rank; in the Kingdom of God, authority is recognized in those whose character resembles that of God. This is why Christ said of the leader in the Kingdom of God: “whoever wants to be first must be slave to all” (Mark 10:43-44). In the eyes of our Lord, “being
precedes doing and doing comes from being. In other words, function comes from character. Those who serve do so because they are servants”.11

In the pagan world, one measures the importance of a person by his superficial power and the influence of his position over others. In the Kingdom of God, greatness is measured by inner humility and service expressed as an external attitude; leaders do not want to be honored particularly: they consider themselves “the lowest”. This is why the Lord does not hide his disapproval of this concept of authority. He even said “It will not be like that among you” (Mt 20:26; Mk 10:43). For Jesus authority is service and it is his raison d’être in the Gospels. This is the Golden Rule which requires the true practice of authority in the Church which is service. In this sense, the Word of God is paramount: its only basis is Jesus Christ, who came to serve and to give his life for mankind (Mt 28:18, Jn 3:30-36).

2.2 The Need for Authority

Authority is necessary in any organization that brings together human beings. The need to establish authority assumes a dual theme: natural and supernatural.

On the natural level, there does not exist a human group capable of balancing by itself its interpersonal life and the attainment of the objectives it sets for itself without a norm (an inner system), and above all without a leader to whom the others must refer. Nothing can be more doubtful than a social group without a dynamic and fervent leader in a role that the others recognize, condemning it to live in a state of anarchy, which jeopardizes the established goals or ideals.

Françoise Rossetti is right to deem the functions of authority to be above all else: the commitment to law, facilitating the group’s objective and the facilitation of internal relations. Facilitating the group’s objective is to be carried out at the level of stimulating the group, coordinating its efforts and its decisions on the opportune means to attain the group’s objectives, whilst the function of facilitating internal relations lies in the growth of cohesion, in strengthening morale, and in maintaining the unity of the group.12

Likewise on the supernatural level, one must remember that the Religious Institute, and the communities which compose it, are communities of the Church. They are desired and publicly constituted by the competent ecclesiastical authority. “Nowhere in the Church does there exist an ecclesial community that has no leader. To the contrary, such a community would be unthinkable, erroneous and above all would not conform to the ecclesial
nature of its place as an integral part of the People of God”\textsuperscript{13}

It is with this in mind that Pope John Paul II underlines that “in the consecrated life the role of the Superiors and the Superior Generals has always had a major importance for the spiritual life as for the mission….those that exercise authority cannot renounce duties as primary leaders of the community, as guides to the brothers and sisters on their spiritual and Apostolic Path”\textsuperscript{14}.

In this service of governance, “it is not easy in highly individualistic circles to make the role that authority plays to the benefit of all, recognized and welcomed. Therefore, what must be reaffirmed is \textit{the importance} of this responsibility, which is \textit{necessary} precisely in order to consolidate fraternal communion and to avoid rendering avowed obedience vain”\textsuperscript{15}.

Pope Benedict XVI justly said in his speech to the Superiors of both genders that “the service of authority requires a constant presence capable of motivating and proposing, of reminding us of the basic purpose of the Consecrated Life, of helping persons, who are entrusted to you to answer with ever renewed fidelity the appeal of the Spirit”\textsuperscript{16}. Authority and obedience are an exercise of charity - the new law which is love (cf. Jn 5:9-15; Jn 6:57) - that leads to the Will of God, to His holiness.

3. Authority in an Adult Community

An adult community is a framework for living where the members have acquired sufficient maturity in their knowledge and growth on a physical, psychological, intellectual, moral and spiritual level. They possess a certain experience of people and of events, a clear-sightedness of things, a level of rectitude and lucidity in the appreciation of values, of people and of events.

3.1 Character of the Members of an Adult Community

Before proceeding to a description of the character of the members of an adult community, it would first of all be suitable to give a sketch of an adult person, of what she is and what she is not.

3.1.1 What an Adult is on the Human Level

An adult is a person who has arrived at her full development, who has attained a maturity which has conferred on her the mastery of her physical and intellectual means, and which makes her psychologically and spiritually capable of an integrity of judgment.

The adult then possesses a capacity to take free decisions and to keep commitments undertaken; she is a person oriented towards realities and
questions of great importance, who is open to the problems of others and of the world; she is a person who has acquired a certain experience of people and things; thus she becomes less severe, more nuanced, more understanding. She is a person who knows that every human being possesses limits and defects, and this does not scandalize her.

According to Cardinal Malula, (now deceased), Founder of the Congregation of the sisters of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus of Kinshasa, an adult person has blossomed into: “a responsible person, who has personal convictions and strives to put them into practice and to communicate them, who acts and is capable of initiatives and original experiences”\(^\text{17}\). The adult is she who has already abandoned or is gradually abandoning childish behavior.

### 3.1.2 What a Non-Adult is on the Human Level

A person who is not adult shows off and delights in her faults or childish whims; she is interested in trivia and in her own little gratifications; she deals in pointless details, incidentals rather than what is essential; she brandishes her rights rather than her obligations; she easily slips into complaints, demands and negative criticisms. She is a self-centered person who takes herself as the center of her community’s interest without opening herself in the slightest to the common interest or to that of other individuals. Based on what has just been stated, one can appreciate that an adult woman religious is a person who makes “a choice once and for all and who bears within herself the passion of the love of God, a passion for charity which excludes any mediocrity and the easy way of doing things. Her life becomes an endless quest for the perfect love.”\(^\text{18}\).

In religious life, to be an adult is to know how to live according to one’s basic choice, totally welcoming all the demands of her circumstance of life with joy and a sense of responsibility, whatever difficulties may arise which may tinge her development. The adult woman religious assumes with serenity the rights and duties associated with her condition and operates within those limits, in such a way that she shows a voluntary openness, without constraint or reluctance, to the demands of her life. In brief, an adult religious is a person who has opted for Jesus (who was crucified in order to devote himself to his mission of salvation), and who already knows enough - through the experience of prayer, obedience and fraternal devotion - about Apostolic service, true poverty and the discipline of life.

### 3.2 The Figure of Authority in an Adult Community

The person of authority in an adult community is first and foremost a
member of the community. Therefore, she must embody the values and vision (the charism and spirituality) of her community. Authority is expressed in terms of obedience, mission and service.

**Authority is obedience.** The Superior is above all else the first to obey, because her authority is practiced in compliance with the Word of God, hence an obedience to God because it is practiced by listening to God, to the Magisterium of the Church and to the law itself, in the service of the common good and of each member of the mission. Just as Father Bernard DUCRUET stressed, authority in the Christian community is at the service of the Word of God. It is distinguished in this way from all other forms of community. It rests on the clear and manifest Word of God, which is primary, and Jesus Christ is its sole foundation 19.

Authority is a mission that one can associate with the triple function of the pastoral ministry of bishops in the Church (Mk 13). The Superior governs while teaching, in dedication to God. The Superior must lead to saintliness.

The Abbot, says Saint Benedict, “will always be remembered by the name he bears,” and it is he who defines the mission that has been entrusted to him, of leading the sons of God to the Father 20. In the women’s community, the **Superior** is **Mother**, but not in the manner of parents who raise their children, even if there is sometimes an analogy. She is the mother in the manner of Christ in the midst of his disciples. Christ had as his mission to reveal to them the Father, to lead them to the Father through his whole being, his example, his teaching. The Superior is not a simple substitute for the natural mother, who might have been lacking; she does not have the job of filling the emotional gaps of our childhood.

The maternity of the Superior is to be taught to the sister so that she discovers her origin and rearing in God 21. Touching on the same idea, a Rwandan proverb says “Only God truly engenders/gives life, people merely educate”.

Only the Superior who is perfectly faithful to the Word of God can envisage here her origin in God, showing herself to be obedient to the teaching of the Gospel, of the Church and to her own rights.

This is why Saint Benedict adds: “He will not teach, create, or order anything apart from the teachings of the Lord. His doctrine, his orders and his example must evoke the filial spirit in the monks, as the fermentation of the Word of Christ” 21.

**Authority is service**, because the Superior must be for his brothers or
her sisters a servant, a motivator with the sole purpose of fulfilling his or her mission in a responsible manner with a view to creating an obedient, united and brotherly/sisterly community, a charismatic community, for each member. Being in the service of the community, the Superior plays the role of scout and guide. It is as if “the spiritual authority draws not its existence from man, friend or foe, but from Christ and from his word which says: ‘I have come to serve and not to be served.’” (Mt 20:27-28). She renounces her desires, be they more or less intense, to decide, to constrain, to dominate or to charm her neighbor. She does not seek to act on people’s emotionalism, nor even to kindle their piety. Her favor extends to all her brothers and sisters and especially to those who are weak, in whom she sees the image that Jesus Christ has marked and wishes to mark with his imprint.

Authority in such a community is not first and foremost based on discipline, but on coordination and guidance. To this end, it must be founded on the Lord and His Word. Thus “true spiritual authority does not prove itself by success or achievement, but depends on humility, on listening to each person, on honesty, on the love for the Lord, His Word and his Church”.

Its ministry is unity – it is a symbol of and accountable for the unity of the community. Is this ideal achievable? One may ask that, but we remain fully conscious that authority in the community, as in the Church, remains a gift of God and the gift remains an ideal against which one must measure oneself each day.

3.3 Authority and its Position in the Community

The Superior exercises her authority according to the plan of God as taught by Christ: “I have come to serve and not to be served” (Mt 20:27-28). In reality the Superior is an imperfect person, who must recognize and outdo herself in order to fulfill the demands of her responsibility. She must promote those human qualities in herself which will make her a decent person, even in a context which is anything but religious. Beyond all these human qualities and those of a woman of a social nature, she must be a woman of confidence. She creates the uninhibited opening up of her members. Thus by her reassurance she encourages others’ self-awareness.

Confidence gives the Superior an interior freedom, the facility and the joy of exercising her authority-service. This confidence is merited and not bought. It is the fundamental basis of her action, which conforms to these rules: to exercise in a spirit of service the authority received from God; to be obedient to the will of God in the exercise of God’s power; to govern the members of the community as children of God; to promote voluntary obedience; to show respect for the human being; to listen to each member of the community; to favor collaboration and encourage initiatives for the
good of the Institute and the Church of God (cf. Canon 618).

3.3.1 The Situation of Authority in the Community

The Superior does not impose herself in a community using absolutist expressions. But she lives in it as one of its members, in cooperation with the others, conscious of her mission of achieving the adaptability and functioning of its other members, because her principal task is to help them attain the religious objectives of the individuals and the community. To highlight this cooperation, African wisdom has a maxim which says: “Mulalenga wa bantu, bantuba mukalenga”, which means “the chief for the people, the people for the chief”. Therefore there is a circularity of belonging. The Superior does not impose on the group her own way of thinking and living. She is the motivator of the community. That brings us back to stimulating the life of the group, to reflect on this in order for it to have a life of its own, beginning with its own manner of being. This is why in a religious community authority is essentially “pastoral”.

From the point of view of functioning, the Superior manages the community beginning with the community itself; she must show great respect for its members since the objectives of the community are not different from those of its members, nor vice versa, since she has entered into their way of thinking.

The Superior is called upon to take on an “attitude of thoughtful and diligent service.” This attitude permits her to transform a community which is passive and without a collective life into a motivated, active group, which supports the potential of its members and of the community itself. One expects to find in her more of a sisterly and an accommodating attitude, than that of an expert who knows everything and how to do everything.

The Superior as Guide to the Community

In exercising guidance, the Superior is attentive not only to the work that her sisters are carrying out but also to all that has to do with their person on the human, emotional, relational, spiritual and religious levels. She goes above and beyond observance to encourage within members an opening up so that they become attentive and interested in living evangelical lives in the joy of the Lord. Being a Superior is more important than acting as a Superior. The fact of being a guide implies having the capacity of knowing how to be with another person, without preventing them from being themselves by an approach that guides rather than commands, with a way of allowing things to arise naturally rather than of organizing them herself.
The Superior as Motivator of the Community

Motivation is a method of governing the community based on collaboration and participation. It will be accomplished through her availability, her kindness and her devotion, her generosity in accepting and understanding the members of the community, her evangelical maturity, her ability to welcome and to live through the circumstances that arise, the acceptance of her own limits, her sensitivity in perceiving the reality of her community and the situations which it encounters, her constantly-progressing and authentic life of prayer, her ability to speak as well as to remain quiet, her ability to discern ambiguities, to live her own fear, to discover and to be able to read her own defense mechanisms and tendencies toward flight and resistance.

3.4 The Means for Action of the Religious Superior

In order to encourage the development of the values which help a community to grow, we focus on several ways of acting that the Religious Superior is expected to use to guarantee a voluntary obedience:

**Information** is an effective means to encourage the awareness, shared responsibility and commitment of the members; **delegation of responsibility** (having the capacity to delegate her power), is the most effective route for identifying a reasonable space in which to organize oneself and to organize the life of the community. It falls to the Superior to bring consciences to life in order to promote voluntary obedience. Therefore, the adult religious will have: sufficient knowledge of the charism and of the demands of the religious life, and of the spirituality and the charism that are characteristic of her institute; she will display a voluntary embrace of faith in all of the above-mentioned, a capacity for listening and for accepting authority, an openness to dialogue, a constancy and stability in discernment, disinterestedness and generosity in her action, and a submission to norms and to authority.

3.5 An Image of a Community of Adults

A religious community is a communion of consecrated persons who make it their profession to search for and to fulfill together the Will of God: a community of brothers and sisters in diverse roles, but sharing the same objective, ideal and passion. All this imparts certain characteristics upon them, which makes them witnesses of the Trinitarian communion. The members of an adult community cultivate Gospel values and fight gradually against anti-values, and possess a great capacity for submission to general and personal norms.
The characteristics of a community of adults are, therefore, articulated co-responsibility, mutual appreciation in the recognition, acceptance and the encouragement of others in their capabilities; in other words, there exists a complementarity. It must be emphasized here that common life, the union, is further perfected if all its members join together in the management of life together. Each member takes her share of responsibility, according to her capacities, towards supporting and completing the action and the initiatives of the community. The complementarity of its members permits a good level of co-responsibility and compliance to the Will of God. An African proverb says that it is only in uniting together that ants arrive at transporting an elephant (Mossi).

4. Image of a Non-Adult Community

This is a community whose members have no reference to Christ at the center of their life. Its members are more likely to freely make demands than to be promoters. This is a community bereft of support and constructive initiatives; a community where one observes the lack of acceptance of authority and submission to general and personal norms.

In a non-adult community, the exercise of authority itself is exposed to difficulties which can show up as defects of authority of which we find several signs: authoritarianism in all its forms, inequality in treatment (favoritism), a lack of respect towards the persons governing and to their human and Christian dignity, the desire to control (an omnipresence of authority), an attitude of monitoring and suspicion, egoism and inertia in not facing up to real problems, a lack of charity, hardheartedness, etc.

Then as consequences, one must also expect defects in obedience whose manifestations can be: revolt or rebellion, recrimination against everything, an attitude of general denigration and gossiping, hypocrisy and lack of sincerity, routine as an approach to life and disgust at everything, childishness, depression, etc.

5. Means for Attaining the Necessary Maturity

The adult community is neither ready-made nor is it spontaneously generated by individuals. It is the fruit of actions and of a culture which finds roots in the initial and on-going formation and in the resourceful person in charge.

Thus from the time of initial formation, one must have training in willpower and an apprenticeship in human values, namely loyalty, rectitude,
a sense of responsibility, a critical spirit, liberty and emotional equilibrium. This training must be done through a formative process which will have to have recourse to certain common practices:

1) Promoting the education of willpower: the education of willpower, its reinforcement or a culture based on it will have to be done by self-denial, in learning to say no or to limit one’s time; by a spirit of generosity in making oneself available on a stable basis; by precision, promptness, self-discipline, self-denial, courage in facing certain difficult situations, personal work and initiatives.

2) Improving the method of discernment: this improvement can only be obtained by creating a hierarchy of values: the values of Christ (virtues), personal values (one’s own projects) and institutional values (such as religious obligations). This practice must be supported by daily prayer and meditation. If discernment is distorted, the dialogue will become empty.

3) Training to listen (to reinforce one’s capacity to listen, one has to try to understand the presence, experience, the here and now of the other person, to listen to her with her heart, to understand and listen, to know when to be quiet and let the other speak…).

4) Respecting the needs of the other person in her entire personality (another form of a culture of obedience consists in knowing and understanding the other person, to have an attitude of sincere, sisterly interest in her growth… another way to cultivate the culture of obedience is through the free and spontaneous service towards all, an availability without limits, a disinterested availability through volunteer and charity work).

Conclusion

Authority, obedience, submission. Biblical submission exists and it is a precious thing, but it must begin with what God desires, and what the Word of God presumes to know, that we are all - individually and collectively (those in authority and the members of the community) - in submission to Jesus Christ; that we are, all of us, submissive in the Church where we live in order to be taken as devoted travelers who serve the Body of Christ and who show ourselves to be faithful. St. Paul is particularly clear: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21).

Peter expresses essentially the same thought when he says: “In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one
another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5).

Love drives us to accept the responsibility of being the “guardian of our brother or sister”. But it forbids us to interfere too energetically in their private life. In fact, we are called to follow the discreet path of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of one another. And we are never called to substitute ourselves for God, nor to do God’s work! 26.

As mutual submission blends into love, it finds its origin in the very nature of the Divinity. By God’s nature, God is Community. The one God is composed of a community of three Persons, who from eternity to eternity share their life together.

It is thus that authority proceeds by a divine intuition of which the Trinity is its expression: a unique community of complementarity and co-responsibility.

---


2 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio ineunte (January 6, 2001), no’s 43-45; Vita Consacrata No. 46.50.

3 cf. Congrégation pour les Instituts de vie consacrée et les Sociétés de vie apostolique, Le service de l’autorité et l’obéissance, no. 3§ 4.


5 NAKAHOSA KABEMBA, J.K., Renowned figure of religious superiors, community promoter. Analyse Juridico pastorale, p.8.

6 Max WEBER, “Economie et Sociale” 992), /wiki/power (Sociology) 28/12/2012

7 Idem

8 J.M. DENQUIN cited by Roger MUCCHIELLI, www.wikipédia.org/ the psychology of relationships. /28/ 12/2012


12 Françoise ROSSETTI HERBELIN, What is Authority?

13 Canons 608 & 617; NAKAHOSA KABEMBA, J.K., idem, p.5

14 ‘Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Post-synodal Exhortation, Vita Consacrata,
Exercising Authority in an Adult Community

Charlotte Sumbamanu, STCJ of Kinshasa

no. 43 Fraternal Life in Community no. 50; Repartir du Christ no. 14

15 Vie fraternelle en communauté nn. 47-53 ; la documentation catholique g1 994) pp.425-426 ; CIC 618 ; proposition 19.


22 cf. Bernard DUCRUET, idem, P.16.


24 Service of Authority and Obedience No. 14

25 Service of Authority and Obedience n° 1.

1. From oppressive power to liberating authority

Speaking in an extremely abstract and simplified way it is possible to differentiate between two different modes of government or management regardless of the context, be it political or ecclesiastical, family or public. These two types of government can be defined by two words that have their origin in Roman politics: “potestas”, power, on the one hand, and “auctoritas,” authority, on the other.

The first type, defined as power, is based on a fundamental inequality, an asymmetry. Anyone who has power has an advantage over other people. This advantage may be based on knowledge, on the accumulation of economic resources or on the possibility of using superior physical, psychological or social violence. The sociologist Max Weber defined power with the now-classic formula: “Power means taking every opportunity of being able to assert one’s own will within a social relationship, even despite resistance, and no matter what this opportunity is based on”¹ Whoever is powerful is able to maintain control of his or her sphere of dominance. He has the means to impose himself on his subjects, to eliminate all resistance and, in the worst cases, to destroy those who do not submit.

The second type of leadership, defined as authority, also presupposes an asymmetry. A person with authority also has an advantage over others. However, the type of relationship between a person with authority and the
The authority of those who suffer

people who respect this authority is fundamentally different from power-based relations. Authority is not characterized by imposition and submission, but is primarily founded on a free and reciprocal recognition. In this kind of relation the “asymmetry” in experience, knowledge, social position or resources does not eliminate the fundamental equality between the two parties in the relationship. Furthermore, authority is not contrary to fraternity and never justifies superiority over other people. You can “take power”, but you can never “take authority”. The person who “has authority” owes it to a free and adult affirmation on the part of those who recognize it. Authority can never become a “possession that cannot be lost”, but rather one which has to be continuously re-earned and received anew. Whoever has authority, destroys it the moment he resorts to violence. Violent imposition and authority are essentially incompatible.

Not imposing your own will on others is by no means synonymous with a loss of authority or its self-suppression. This renunciation implies neither weakness nor an “anti-authoritarian” or “laissez-faire” attitude. Quite to the contrary, true authority needs people of great strength. Such people use their inner strength and energy not to keep others in a state of infantile dependence, but rather to encourage them to grow in every way: in their human, social, political and spiritual development.

Also “liberating authority” has nothing at all to do with anarchy. To discern authority in a liberating way demands the use of all one’s vital energies to create and firmly protect social spaces that make life flourish; that promote the development of persons and communities, that make free and respectful relationships possible. The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, which are also the constitutions of my own congregation, say: “The Superior General has full authority over the Society ad aedificationem (in order to build it up).” With authority the defenceless must be protected from those who exploit them both within and outside the community, without falling into the trap of paternalism or maternalism. The tragedy of authoritarian systems is the result of the way in which oppressed people seek to feel powerful by oppressing others who are weaker. (This, in my opinion, is one of the tragic roots of the scandal of sexual and physical abuse committed by priests and religious).

People with true authority are not bothered with trying to preserve their own power, but, on the contrary, are driven by the desire for other people to grow in autonomy and freedom of action. True authority increases in relation to the extent that it causes others to grow: Jesus frees the crippled woman from the demon that has bent her double, and protects her from authorities who want to prevent her healing by appeals to ritual law.
– thus endangering his own life. He uses his confident and vigorous authority to “empower her” so that she can straighten up on her own. He gives her back her human dignity, he liberates her to walk upright and free (cf. Lk 13: 10-17).

Application ad intra

What has been said so far can be taken for granted with regards to religious life. Certainly, in recent decades, religious congregations have changed their discourse with regards to the exercise of administration and authority. There is no doubt that there is also a great deal of good will directed towards putting it into practice. However, there are many concerns arising from the reality of everyday life. Can we take it for granted that superiors and formators, with authority, ensure that each Sister - from the novice to the most elderly – is able to develop “as God conceived her”? Or does it not happen all too often that the “formation processes” (both initial and ongoing) are more akin to a “Procrustean bed”? (Procrustes is an evildoer from Greek mythology who offered hospitality to solitary travellers. If the victims were tall and their body longer than the bed, then he cut the protruding parts of the body. If the victims were shorter than the bed, he stretched them by force. The “Procrustean bed” is, therefore, a metaphor for an arbitrary standard and for a brutally enforced conformity. Is there not still a dominant concern in the congregations that people “fit in” rather than being willing to accompany them on their fascinating and adventurous journey to their very personal mystery and to their full self-realization? Is there not a predominant fear of those who exceed the norm? “What sticks out, gets cut off”, as a German proverb has it.

A particularly sad variant of the “Procrustean bed” was the “formation” of African, Asian or Latin American sisters in foundations of European origin. In the name of religious formation their cultural characteristics were destroyed and subjected to a violent ‘Europeanization’. Individuals were severely mutilated, separated from the deepest sources of their vitality and creativity. Have we really in the depths of our being overcome the arrogance of Eurocentrism and the mania of superiority associated with it? Have we Europeans really given up the “sovereignty of interpretation” concerning what religious life is and has to be? Can we serenely accept and respect the process of ‘de-Europeanization’ and the richness of cultural diversity: the many different and varied ways of living in community, of living out our personal mission, and of expressing our relationship with God?

Similar questions are arising with respect to the way human relationships are lived in congregations. In our discourse we have passed the vertical-
hierarchical model, centred on the superior who then controls all the relationships of the sisters within the community and, even more particularly, the relationships they have outside it. There is no question that these models, suffered and internalized over the centuries, continue to act on an unconscious level, and therefore in a more subtle manner. Have formation processes actually freed themselves from the model of dependence and control, or do they still continue, in a hidden way, their destructive work? Do they actually promote and facilitate the development of adult relationships and recognize the fundamental value of friendship among the sisters and with the people we want to serve? An abyss separates the harmony and liveliness between mature adults who are secure in their own identity, and barren uniformity. In the final analysis, a community structured along lines of control and uniformity is of no use to its evangelical mission. The only model of community which commits us is the movement of Jesus: simple, fraternal and with great human warmth to welcome and share life with all those excluded from the banquet of the rich and powerful.

**Application ad extra**

These two conceptions of leadership can be illustrated also by using the “Meditation of the Two Standards” in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius invites us to engage in an exercise of the imagination, imagining two opposing leaders, Christ and Lucifer. He describes the profile of these two modes of governance, poles apart, with metaphors which are both striking and primitive: Lucifer, the “mortal enemy of human nature” can be found established in Babylon “on a great throne of fire and smoke, horrible and frightening in its appearance.” It is an impressive manifestation of power that is fascinating and, at times, almost inevitably, results in a first reaction of submission and servility. It is a power based on fear. Lucifer teaches his demons subtle tactics of seduction. He commands them to awaken in their followers, first of all, a greed for riches, then to make them susceptible to the wiles of vain ambition and pride: His cunning trick consists in seducing them with the false promise that those who submit to his rule will increase in power and prestige. But, in truth, this dynamic leads to a system of dependency, which destroys all self-determination and leads to a brutal subjugation. In the end, perpetrators and victims will find themselves trapped in the same “chains and nets.”

The application of these primitive metaphors to the forces that today dominate much of the world is obvious. The arms industry, stock markets and rating agencies with their bombastic liturgies and symbols of power, are condemning countless human beings to misery. Just like the demons, the individuals who act, moneylenders and lobbyists, are faceless: they
remain hidden behind a deceptive facade, behind “the smoke and fire.”

The “other standard”, the other leader that Ignatius presents to us is “Christ our Lord”, resident in Jerusalem, “a humble place, beautiful and pleasant.” No demonstration of power, but rather an invitation to poverty and humility. Ignatius wants to provoke us with the paradox that Christ “conquers” the whole world with a radical renunciation of all violence and imposition – and he invites his disciples to follow him on the same path. The world’s motor, at the time of Ignatius of Loyola, as well as today, is greed for the accumulation of wealth and possessions. The prestige granted to a particular person, or a social group, is measured by the amount of their accumulated wealth. Those who do not submit to this logic are ridiculed and made to feel their impotence. The call of Christ to poverty and humility is an invitation to “reverse the course” of the logic of the world in a radical way. In a speech given in Barcelona on November 6, 1989 ten days before his assassination, Ignacio Ellacuría said: “Only utopically and hopefully can one believe and have the courage to stand alongside all the poor and oppressed people in the world and with them to attempt to change history, to subvert it and throw it in another direction.” Humility is not a perverse and self-destructive desire for humiliation, but rather it is the courage and the freedom to live in a radically counter-cultural way and a willingness to assume the consequences of this courage without a fuss. Revealing nets of dependency and bringing them into the open, unmasking the power games, the servilism and the voracity for profits disturbs the interests of the powerful and, for this very reason, attracts persecution and the cross as a matter of course. But it is only through those who have the courage to risk taking the path of Jesus, that the Kingdom of God can break into this real world and only through them is it possible for relationships between people to become truly human.

It is obvious that the Church in all its dimensions and on all levels, as well as the religious orders, can be attacked by the mould of the “logic of the world”. Even in our communities we live in a constant struggle between “the two kingdoms,” between “the two standards”. Therefore, to exercise authority within and outside the Church, we need people that have integrated all their vital and aggressive energies and are able to use them freely for the inevitable “battle”. Certainly, the motivation that drives them is not the thirst for power, but the passion for life, the passion for the victims of power, which is God’s own passion. If we are to discover and denounce the structures (and the hidden people standing behind them) which subjugate and exploit people we need clear eyes and pure and honest hearts.
Jesus is the incarnated “liberating authority” and his way of “governing” is the archetype and the “canon”, the normative measure of any legitimate authority in the Church. However, in the early centuries of Christianity, the patriarchal model began to replace the style of Jesus. What a difference between the authority of Jesus and the good patriarch of the pastoral letters! On the one hand Jesus, who values the small and the marginalized, and maintains fraternal and equal relations with women - and therefore challenges the priests and elders and freely faces Pilate, the representative of the Empire, who has the power to torture and kill him. On the other hand, as a model of the forthcoming ecclesial authority, the “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence.” (1Tim 3:4). Forgive my question, which may seem naive or malicious, but which is totally sincere: How was it possible that the Church should move away so quickly from the words of Jesus: “You are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Mt 23:8f)?

We know that things became even more complicated when the Church, in the fourth century, was no longer a persecuted minority and became the Church of the Empire, participating in and supporting its power. Evangelical authority was transformed into “potestas sacra”, “sacred power”. The Christian community ceased to be a martyrial Church in the way of Jesus, the first martyr, giving his life for the defence of victims. More and more, the Church became part of the world that produces victims, or at least tolerates their being treated as “collateral damage.” This symbiosis between political and ecclesiastical power bears the serious danger that the Church may betray its essence, its mission, and may thus lose its authority, which has its only valid foundation in Jesus. It turned itself into a powerful institution that primarily defended its own interests. However, from its beginnings as a community of Jesus, the Church has only one right to exist: to present the Gospel as a liberating and redeeming reality – in the midst of what is hassling, bedevilling and enslaving mankind here and now.

2. The Empty Chair

For the Catholic tradition, the concept of “representation” is essential to the understanding of authority in the Church. An echo of this is found in the rules and constitutions of orders and congregations. The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus speak in a very natural way of the Pope as the “Vicar of Christ our Lord,” and the Superior as “one who holds the place of Christ our Lord.” But, is it really possible to “represent”, to “hold the place of” Christ, of “the Messiah”? And can this principle of the “opus operatum” be
effective, the “representation” not by the authority or charisma of a particular person, but by virtue of a given assignment? Can Jesus’ liberating authority really be institutionalized? Is it possible to represent the absolute authority of God in this world in which everything remains subjected to contingency and relativity?

One can assume, of course, that all this should not be understood in the manner of pharaohs and emperors, as an apotheosis that elevates a historical figure to the rank of the gods, nor in the way of rulers and leaders who “by the grace of God” subdued populations. In the course of modernity, the Church and theology have learned through a painful process that it is not possible to apply this model to the government of the Church and that the dictates of the time demand that spiritual authority and political power be separated. Far too late did the Second Vatican Council finally teach us that “representation” should not be understood as an anti-democratic concept that denies people’s dignity and codifies as well as perpetuates top-down constructions of power.

Ultimately, what is the true meaning of “representation” and “Vicar of Christ on earth,” of being “in the place of Christ”? In effect, ecclesial and spiritual power is a paradox that exists only in the continuous nullification of itself. It betrays its essence and vocation at the very moment in which it “takes” the power, in which power is established as among the powerful of this world. On the contrary, the more it represents the authority of God, the authority of Christ, the more it remains only an indicator, a hand pointing outwards towards the greater Other. “Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ” (Mt 23:10). The over long index finger of the Baptist that points to Christ crucified in Mathias Grünewald’s altarpiece can serve as the symbol of this representation: “I am not. … I am not the Christ” (John 1: 20-21).

Every “representation” of God’s authority is subject to the “prohibition of images”: “You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God” (Ex 20:4-5). The noblest task of spiritual authority is to keep free, decidedly, the space which belongs to God alone.

In the Jewish tradition there is the metaphor of the empty chair. During the Seder, the meal of the night of Pesach, a chair is left at the table for the prophet Elijah, which expresses the hope that he will return with the Messiah. Agnes Heller, a philosopher of Hungarian-Jewish origin who narrowly escaped the Nazi killing machine, interprets this metaphor in a
brilliant way. “The empty chair is waiting for the Messiah. If anyone occupies this chair, you can be sure that he is a false or perverted Messiah. If someone takes the chair away, everything is over and the Spirit will leave the community. Politics cannot make use of this unoccupied chair, but as long as it is left where it is, exactly in the centre of the room, in which it remains motionless with its admonishing – and perhaps even pathetic - emptiness, political actors will have to deal with its existence. At least they can choose to deal with its existence. Everything else is pragmatism.”

If this requirement is applicable to any exercise of political power, it is even more valid for any exercise of spiritual authority. It does not allow for any “enthronement”, for whoever sits upon the chair profanes it. Authority in the Church is legitimate only insofar as it decisively leaves as empty that space which does not belong to it.

3. “The terrible banality of evil” in the name of obedience

To speak of obedience in a world that has experienced the Enlightenment’s critique is a very difficult matter: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity” resounds the Kantian motto. In a post-Enlightenment world the renunciation of self-determination is no longer considered a virtue, but a form of cowardice which does not dare to accept the responsibility for its own actions– in the final analysis, an immoral way to behave. To be guided by the policy and the will of others without reappraising it seems to be an alienation which is unworthy of an adult person. However, it is not only difficult but virtually impossible to speak of obedience – or even of obedience as a religious virtue – after the scary fascist and totalitarian systems of the twentieth century.

In 1961, the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt witnessed the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, as a journalist. Eichmann organized the transport of millions of Jews to concentration death camps. Her most horrible discovery was that of the “terrible banality of evil”. This man, who sent thousands of human beings to their gruesome deaths, lacked any motive, nor was there anything grandiose in his perversion. Eichmann was simply a bureaucrat, an “administrative mass exterminator” who committed his crimes with a clear conscience, because he was performing the acts required by his duties, acting in obedience to “higher orders”. Submission to authority thus showed itself to be a tool of barbarism.

In Arendt’s story it is jarring to read how Eichmann, in his defence, exalted “blind obedience” and “corpse-like obedience”, a perverse echo of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. Nazi executioners, like the slayer
of all the military dictatorships and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, justified themselves by saying that they acted moved by “due obedience”. Since then, the word “obedience” has been definitively besmirched and spent.

With this in mind, can one hope to redeem obedience as a concept of religious life, of religious life renewed according to the Second Vatican Council? Of course we must remember that Ignatius of Loyola – in harmony with the whole tradition of religious life – poses one essential condition for obedience: to listen to the voice of the superior “as if it came from Christ our Lord,” “in all cases in which there is no evidence of sin” and “in all things to which obedience can be extended.” In no way does Ignatius suspend individual responsibility, nor does he deny the dignity of every person’s conscience or deliver it to the whims of a superior. But this will not suffice as an answer if we honestly expose ourselves to just criticism.

The vow of obedience, religious obedience, can ultimately only be addressed to God. In traditional language, fulfilling the will of God is the only legitimate reason for religious obedience. For this very reason, the truly obedient are also truly free and are therefore a threat to the powerful. They are fully aware that they are unconditionally committed to the ultimate authority, and consequently they are free from all kinds of servilism. Even if their own lives are at risk, they have the courage to brave any penultimate authority: they are liberated to see clearly and to walk upright in the footsteps of Jesus.

The decisive question is, however,: how do we find the will of God in the daily reality of our lives without deceiving ourselves and without lapsing into infantilism? Ultimately, is there nothing for us to do but to protect the “empty chair” that leads us to the transcendent mystery of God and, thus, at the same time protects the individual conscience? Or is there ultimately a true mediation, a “real presence”, a “sacrament” of the supreme authority, “materialized” in a real and concrete way in this world that, in its own right, demands - and deserves – our unconditional obedience?

4. The authority of those who suffer

“I only know one authority that cannot be withdrawn by any enlightenment or emancipation: the authority of those who suffer,” states the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz, in a conversation with the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel.

The authority of God is certainly not realised in some kind of apotheosis, in the manifestations of power – neither of political power nor of sacral
power – but rather “sub specie contrarii”, in that which appears to be its opposite. The plenitude of God’s authority is truly present, has body and visibility, in the most vulnerable, in the powerless, in the victims. Jesus himself, in his famous parable of the final judgment (Matthew 25) puts the whole history of mankind under “the authority of those who suffer.” They are the only authority in which the authority of God who is Judge of all humanity, of the whole world and at all times, becomes manifest. “The moral conscience constitutes itself in obedience to their authority. What we call the voice of conscience is our reaction to the visitation by the suffering of others.”

The present dominant political system, liberal democracy, has an ideology strongly focused on the “equality” of all human beings. As a result, with good or bad intentions, it often simulates a fantasy world, presenting the illusion of an egalitarian world without suffering, where everyone possesses the same opportunities. But this fiction has nothing to do with our real world. Precisely because our world is characterized by the scandal of inequality and injustice, does the “partiality” of God need a “representation” in concrete history, for the benefit of the victims, the marginalized and the excluded. “The Church does not exist in order to represent political power, but to remind us of political impotence.” This, ultimately, is truly the legitimization of every authority in the Church.

Those who die of hunger or violence as a result of a scandalous inequality; migrants, beaten back by the USA and the European Union on their southern borders; political prisoners, indeed all victims: – they all represent the highest authority which we, without any ifs or buts, must obey. No instance, not even the highest hierarchical instance in the Church, stands above this authority. A mature sense of obedience and mature love of the Church know that this is the noblest vocation of religious life– the service which we indeed owe the Church – to submit to the authority of the victims and to plead prophetically for the whole Church to be determined and configured by this authority. If the Church does not do this, she disfigures the face of Jesus Christ.

How to live the vow of obedience when faced with “the authority of those who suffer”?

Basically, “blind obedience” – in the distorted sense – is an attitude of convenience and unworthy of adult conduct: to refer to the command of another, to carry out an order and escape, in this manner, personal responsibility and the consequences of one’s actions. “Those who suffer” are also “issuing orders” which commit us in an unconditional and radical
way, but this does not at all cancel our individual responsibility. To obey the command of the victims does not make us infantile, but on the contrary requires of us a free and adult act which comes from the depths of our person. It is exactly this act which makes us truly human persons.

To live our vow of obedience under the authority of those who suffer is a complex process with many dimensions: personal and communal, mystical and political. But it all starts with something simple and basic: awakening from our narcissism and our self-referential world, and opening our eyes and hearts to the suffering of other human beings. The key thing is to resist the temptation to look the other way or to take refuge in apathy. In the parable of the “Good Samaritan,” Jesus says that a man had fallen into the hands of bandits who robbed and beat him. A priest and a Levite saw the injured, but had “more important interests” with which to deal. But those looking for “God” in the sense of Jesus do not know any “more important interests”. God is waiting for them in their oppressed brothers or sisters, and they are not going to find God anywhere else. Christianity knows no other mysticism than the mysticism of “open eyes”.

And so how must we respond to what our eyes see and our heart feels in the face of a human being who is suffering? In the most simple and natural way: making sure that his wounds are cared for, that he has something to eat, somewhere to sleep and that his immediate needs are dealt with. Doing this is not an act of generosity, but rather this means in a very elementary way obeying the authority of those who suffer. A long process of discernment is not necessary in order to decide what to do. Quite to the contrary, it cries out for every upright person to respond in this way. This experience corresponds to what Ignatius describes as “the first time one can make a good and healthy choice”: the will of God is revealed in an immediate and unsettling way. “Without doubting or even being able to doubt, carries out what was proposed”13 - otherwise it would be a clear case of disobedience. In the words of a modern philosopher: “Look closely and you’ll know what you have to do.”14

It would be a big step if we would only act sincerely and unreservedly in those situations that make demands on us in a clear and obvious way. But we know that life is often much more complex and ambiguous than that. Firstly, because it is not always obvious which measures are really those that will benefit the life of another person and, secondly, because most of the time the perpetrators are not the odd robber out there, but people who become really dangerous by being part of the “nets of evil”. These “nets” can be organized crime, international trafficking with people and organs, or neo-liberal economic politics and the greed for oil or “rare-earths”, or...
The authority of those who suffer

In addition, there is a disturbing and difficult question: how is it possible to translate the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan into the context of a globalized world? Today it is not just one person who has fallen into the hands of some bandits, but rather a decisive part of humanity that is at their mercy. A serious and profound discernment is needed here in order to understand how to defend the lives of victims in the face of this mass threat. With regards to this, obeying “the authority of those who suffer” demands mobilising all the scientific insights as well as all the creativity and imagination available to us and using our drive and energy in order to create spaces in which life can flourish in this real world - so disfigured by sin and the structures of sin.

What Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great martyr of the German Lutheran Church, said in his historical context, is still true today: it is no sufficient “to assist the victims under the wheel,” we are required to “block the spokes in order to stop the wheel.” In this dimension, mercy and passionate love must be translated into well-thought-out strategies. With the shrewdness of the Gospel we, as religious congregations, are called to become aware of our advantage and our experience as one of the first “global players” in human history and to use it as a trump card: using the international networks both within our congregation and also in cooperation with other congregations, to build up relationships with all those who struggle for the humanization of the planet.

Responding “to the authority of those who suffer” with discernment – and thus living out our vow of obedience - is an ongoing and demanding task. It is a task that calls for the surrender of every person in their innermost being, and is a task that requires a community commitment which is both constant and dogged. Basically, it is an exercise in “contemplation”, the exercise of awareness and fidelity, looking and listening, so that “the authority of the victims”, the “sacrament of God’s will” can speak to us. What is necessary, is a heart that listens patiently in order to understand what it means for us in concrete terms and in this particular situation to obey the victims.

If we are serious about this concept of obedience to the authority of those who suffer, what are we to make of the role of a superior in a religious community? Has this role become superfluous? Certainly not, but a rigorous effort is required in order to rethink its function, going back to the origins of religious life. There is no doubt that even superiors are under “the authority of those who suffer” and committed to it. Exactly because of this, however, is the authority of the superior more necessary than ever. Her most noble task is to watch carefully over this, to ensure that the whole
community submits to the only legitimate representation of God’s authority in a continuous process. The superior’s role is to call for discernment insistently, above all ensuring that the whole community gets in gear “ready and diligently”\(^\text{16}\): to seek physical proximity to the poor and excluded, sharing with them their life and their misery, learning their language and seeking and enjoying their friendship. In accordance with this, tremendous hope is given by Pope Francis defining his ministry in exactly this way, thus opening a path which we can follow when he says: “The Church is called to step outside herself and to go to the margins, not just geographical ones, but also those which are existential: those of the mystery of sin, pain, injustice, those of ignorance and lack of faith, those of ignorance, those of every form of misery.”

If we decide to submit ourselves definitely to “the authority of the suffering,” we will be moving towards a profoundly evangelical renewal of religious life, towards a life which is both authentic and fruitful, lived according to the evangelical counsels. And our most vulnerable brothers and sisters will become our true champions, showing us the way into the mystery of God.

2 *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, No. 736.
3 *Spiritual Exercises* No. 136-147.
7 “denying with blind obedience every opinion and personal judgment to the contrary, in all things being led by the order of the superior ... convinced as we are that everyone who lives under obedience should allow himself to be led and governed by Providence, through the superior, as if he were a dead body.”

8 *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, No. 547 and 549.
13 Cf. *Spiritual Exercises* No. 175.
16 *Spiritual Exercises* No. 91.
As women religious called to leadership, we want to live this service:

* As Jesus of Nazareth, the Suffering Servant, (Is. 42) who washed the feet of his disciples teaching us all the true meaning of leadership as service of others and who gave us the example of self-giving love to the ultimate consequences.

* As a service of life that demands profound listening with the heart, to reality within ourselves, our Congregation, the world and all creation. And, to live this, in a spirit of constant discernment, attentive to history and in communion with the Church.

* Breaking open the Scriptures to understand the true service of authority, fostering a deep life of prayer and contemplation. And, by serving others with Gospel attitudes of compassion, tenderness, humility, unconditional generosity, hope-filled patience and total self-giving.

* Acknowledging the ultimate authority of God, maintaining the “empty chair” in our lives as the space belonging to God alone. Recognizing and accepting the strength of our personal weakness, fragility, vulnerability, and the need to foster “adult communities”.

* Building quality relationships which lead to communion based on Trinitarian love through mutual respect, participation and dialogue. And, by sharing leadership with others, reinforcing “inner security” through collaboration, consultation and solidarity.

* As “seekers of the good” in persons and events, looking always for signs of hope, in order to encourage, nurture and celebrate them.

* As a pathway free of abusive power, yet open to that which ignites and releases energy in service of the Gospel: “the power of encouragement, influence, hospitality and resilience”.

* As “graced companions”, transformational leaders who share vision, help enkindle new energy, open horizons, offer challenges and are able to risk courageously like the foundresses/founders of our Congregations thus re-envisioning our Charisms in this time of new beginnings.
* Opting with passion for the “authority of those who suffer”\(^7\), with the “mysticism of open eyes”\(^8\), listening to their pain, companioning them in their dreams and creating with them spaces in which life can joyfully flourish.

* **Living generatively** so as to enable new life and direction, develop individual gifts for mission, *meet the challenge of intercultural living*\(^9\) and prepare future leaders.

* Creating spaces of **global solidarity** and networking, with women and men, religious and laity in equal partnership, joining voices for the sake of justice and those who suffer.

* As **Mary**, courageous woman of faith, who knew how to *give life, nurture life* in all situations, and *let go of life*\(^10\) at the right moment in order to accept and make real God’s dream in our times.

---

1. Marta Zechmeister, CJ. “La Autoridad de los que Sufren”. Pg. 4
3. Mary John Mananzan, OSB. “Post Vatican II Perspectives on Religious Leadership”. Pg 3
4. Mary Pat Garvin, RSM. “Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today”. Pg. 6
5. Cf. Garvin, RSM. Pg. 1
6. Marian Ambrosio, IDP. “La Vida Religiosa en Brasil”
7. Marta Zechmeister, CJ. “La Autoridad de los que Sufren”. Pg. 6
8. Cf. Zechmeister. Pg. 6
9. Pat Murray, IBVM. “Intercultural Leadership”
10. Prof. Bruna Costacurta. “Authority in the Bible”. Pg.4
ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Paul VI Audience Hall - Wednesday, 8 May 2013

Your Eminence,
Venerable and Dear Brother in the Episcopate,
Dear Sisters,

I am glad to meet you today and I wish to greet each one of you to thank you for all you do to ensure that the consecrated life is always a beacon on the Church’s journey. Dear sisters, first of all I thank dear Brother Cardinal João Braz de Aviz for his words to me, and I appreciate the presence of the Secretary of the Congregation. The theme of your Meeting seems to me particularly important for the task entrusted to you: “The service of authority according to the Gospel”. In light of this expression I would like to propose to you three simple thoughts, that I leave for your personal and communal analysis.

Jesus, at the Last Supper, turns to the Apostles with these words: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16). They remind us all, not only us who are priests, that vocation is always an initiative of God. It is Christ who called you to follow him in the consecrated life and this means continuously making an “exodus” from yourselves in order to centre your life on Christ and on his Gospel, on the will of God, laying aside your own plans, in order to say with St Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). This “exodus” from ourselves means setting out on a path of adoration and service. The exodus leads us on a journey of adoring the Lord and of serving him in our brothers and sisters. To adore and to serve: two attitudes that cannot be separated, but must always go hand in hand. To adore the Lord and to serve others, keeping nothing for oneself: this is the “self-emptying” of whoever exercises authority. May you live and always remember the centrality of Christ, the evangelical identity of the consecrated life. Help your communities to live the “exodus” from the self on a journey of adoration and service, above all through the three pillars of your life.

Obedience as listening to the will of God, in the interior movement of the Holy Spirit authenticated by the Church, accepting that obedience also passes through human mediation. Remember that the relationship between authority and obedience fits into the broader context of the mystery of the Church and constitutes a special realization of her role as mediator (cf. Congregation for
Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, The Service of Authority and Obedience, n. 12).

Poverty as overcoming every kind of selfishness, in the logic of the Gospel which teaches us to trust in God’s Providence. Poverty as a sign for the entire Church that it is not we who build the Kingdom of God. It is not human means that make it grow, but it is primarily the power and the grace of the Lord, working through our weakness. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”, the Apostle to the Gentiles tells us (2 Cor 12:9). A poverty teaches solidarity, sharing and charity, and is also expressed in moderation and joy in the essential, to put us on guard against material idols that obscure the real meaning of life. A poverty learned with the humble, the poor, the sick and all those who are on the existential outskirts of life. A theoretical poverty is no use to us. Poverty is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, in the poor, in the sick and in children.

Then there is chastity, as a precious charism that broadens the freedom of our gift to God and to others, with tenderness, mercy, closeness to Christ. Chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven shows how the emotions have their place in mature freedom and become a sign of the world to come, to make God’s primacy shine out ever brighter. But, please, let it be a “fruitful” chastity which generates spiritual children in the Church. The consecrated woman is a mother, she must be a mother, not a “spinster”! Excuse me for speaking like this, but motherhood in the consecrated life is important, this fruitfulness! May this joy of spiritual fecundity motivate your life; be mothers, as a figure of Mary, Mother, and of Mother Church. It is impossible to understand Mary without her motherhood; it is impossible to understand the Church apart from her motherhood and you are icons of Mary and the Church.

A second element I would like to underline in the exercise of authority is service: we must never forget that true power, at any level, is service, whose bright summit is upon the Cross. Benedict XVI, with great wisdom, often reminded the Church that although man frequently equates authority with control, dominion, success, for God authority is always synonymous with service, humility, love; it means entering the logic of Jesus who kneels to wash the Apostles’ feet (cf. Angelus, 29 January 2012), and says to his disciples: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.... It shall not be so among you”, which is precisely the theme of your meeting, ‘it shall not be so among you’, “but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:25-27). Let us think of the damage done to the People of God by men and women of the Church who are careerists, climbers, who “use” the People, the
Church, our brothers and sisters — those they should be serving — as a springboard for their own ends and personal ambitions. These people do the Church great harm.

May you always know how to exercise authority by accompanying, understanding, helping and loving; by embracing every man and every woman, especially people who feel alone, excluded, barren, on the existential margins of the human heart. Let us keep our gaze fixed on the Cross: there is found any authority in the Church, where the One who is the Lord becomes a servant to the point of the total gift of himself.

Lastly, ecclesiality as one of the constitutive dimensions of the consecrated life. It is a dimension that must be constantly reclaimed and deepened in life. Your vocation is a fundamental charism for the journey of the Church, and it is impossible for a consecrated man or woman not to “think” with the Church. “Thinking” with the Church begot us at Baptism; “thinking” with the Church finds one of its filial expressions in faithfulness to the Magisterium, in communion with the Pastors and the Successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome, a visible sign of unity. Proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel, for every Christian, are never an isolated act. This is important: for every Christian the proclamation of and witness to the Gospel are never an isolated act of an individual or a group. No evangelizer acts, as Paul VI recalled very well, “in virtue of a... personal inspiration, but in union with the mission of the Church and in her name” (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi, n. 60). And Paul VI proceeded: It is an absurd dichotomy to think of living with Christ without the Church, of following Jesus outside his Church, of loving Jesus without loving the Church (cf. ibid, n. 16). Be aware of the responsibility that you have in forming your Institutes in the sound doctrine of the Church, in love for the Church and in the ecclesial spirit.

In short, the centrality of Christ and of his Gospel; authority as a service of love; “thinking” in and with Mother Church. These are the three indicators that I would like to leave with you, to which I add yet once again, my gratitude for your work, which is not always easy. What would the Church do without you? She would lack your motherhood, warmth, tenderness and motherly intuition!

Dear sisters, you may be sure that I follow you with affection. I pray for you, but please also pray for me. Please greet your communities for me, especially the sick and the young sisters. I encourage everyone to follow with parresia and with joy the Gospel of Christ. Be joyful, for it is beautiful to follow Jesus, it is beautiful to become a living icon of Our Lady and of our hierarchical Holy Mother Church. Thank you.