

IN THE CHURCH OF THE COUNCIL

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PREFACE

At 50 years distance from the Second Vatican Council, historian and theologian **Adriana Valerio** presents us with a short but interesting account of the twenty-three women who participated in Vatican II. *Women of the Council* tells of these women, of the motives for which they were chosen and of the influence that they had on the conciliar documents. Their presence is revealed not only as having been symbolic, as was anticipated, but also to have left its mark.

Cardinal Danneels proposes, with great clarity and with a simple wisdom that is mature with age, a way of “*To love the Church*” within a secularism that so heavily influences the faithful. With great realism, he insists on the fact that the Church is “dark but beautiful”, and invites us to take an in-depth look at the Mystery that constitutes it, in order to help us realise that Mary is the one who instills the Church with a profound humanity. Being faithful to the Church does not mean ignoring her defects, but to be faithful to her in spite of everything, to accept the different views and to live in hope until death.

The address of **Sister Pat Farrell**, president of the LCWR, to the female Major Superiors gathered in assembly a few months after the receipt of the doctrinal evaluation from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, reveals great human and evangelical depth. *Navigating the shifts* is like a little treatise, encouraging a moving forward through - and despite - the current difficulties, starting with contemplation, a prophetic voice, and a solidarity with those marginalised from society, non-violence and a life of joyous hope.

The question which the Dominican, **Jean Claude Lavigne**, poses goes well beyond the title, *Novices? What Novices?*, because his presentation looks at the future of our congregations on the basis of the bond of “grafting” that is established between a congregation and a particular sort of young person. Jean Claude Lavigne groups the young people who approach our congregations into six categories. He highlights what contributions and challenges each type could present for a congregation during their formation, with the aim of bringing about a successful graft. All of this is treated with a great openness towards the dynamism of the new, but without renouncing those elements that are essential to religious life.

Starting with an understanding of compassion as God’s mode of

being, **José Antonio Pagola** unravels the evangelical command to “*Be compassionate , as your Father is compassionate*”. “compassion is not just one more virtue but rather the unique way for us to become like God”. And, beginning with Jesus’ testimony, he proposes compassion not as a sentiment, but as a lifestyle that results in an interiorisation of the sufferings of others, entering the depths of one’s being to the extent of making it a cause of action. Compassion leads us to a radical following of the Christ.

Finally, **Sister Estrella Castalone**, informs us about the project called *Talitha Kum*, which fights the trafficking of women and children, and which was started by the UISG in 2009. It is composed of a network that links and coordinates around 600 religious women who are fighting trafficking in more than 84 countries.

**PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE UISG
ROME 3RD-7TH MAY 2013**

“IT WILL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU” (MT 20:26)

The service of leadership according to the Gospel

REGISTRATIONS UNTIL JANUARY 31, 2013

WOMEN OF THE COUNCIL

Adriana Valerio

*Adriana Valerio, historian and theologian, is a professor of Christian and Church History at the Frederic II University of Naples. Numbered as one of the founders of the Committee of Italian Female Theologians, she has been engaged for more than twenty years in gathering sources and testimonies in order to reconstruct the memoirs of the women in Christian history. The article presented here was extrapolated by the author from her latest publication: Adriana Valerio, *Madri della Concilio. Ventitré donne al Vaticano II*, Carocci, Roma 2012.*

Original in Italian

On Tuesday 8th September 1964, in the audience hall of Castel Gandolfo, Paul VI officially announced the attendance of female observers at the Council and, on the 25th of the same month, the first woman entered the hall: the French *Marie-Louise Monnet*, founder of the International Movement of Apostolate in the Independent Social Milieus (MIAMSI).

Between September 1964 and July 1965, a total of 23 female observers were summoned: 10 religious and 13 lay women, generally selected against criteria of internationality and representation. The religious were as follows, as per the order in which they were summoned:

1. *Mary Luke Tobin* (of the Sisters of Loreto), American, president of the Conference of Superiors General of Female Institutions in America;
2. *Marie de la Croix Khouzam* (Egyptian Sisters of the Sacred Heart), Egyptian, president of the Union of Egyptian Religious;
3. *M. Henriette Ghanem* (Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary of Beirut), Lebanese, president of the Maronite Superiors General;
4. *Sabine de Valon* (Sacred Heart), French, superior general of the Sacred Heart religious order and president of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG);
5. the German sister *Juliana Thomas* (Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ), secretary general of the Union of Mother-Superiors of Germany;

6. *Suzanne Guillemin* (Daughters of Charity), French, superior general of the Daughters of Charity;
7. *Cristina Estrada* (Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus), Spanish, superior general of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus;
8. *Costantina Baldinucci* (Sisters of Charity of Saints Bartolomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa, known as the Sisters of the Child Mary), Italian, president of the Italian Federation of Religious Hospitaliers;
9. *Claudia Feddish* (Byzantine-rite sisters of the order of St. Basil), American, superior general of the Order of the Basilian Sisters;
10. *Jerome M. Chimy* (Ukrainian Byzantine-rite Handmaids of Mary Immaculate), Canadian, superior general of the Handmaids of Mary Immaculate.

As one can see from this brief list however, the selection criteria were driven by other motivations. Criteria of internationality and representation had indeed been adopted for some of the female religious observers: this is evident in the cases of the Institute of the Sacred Heart and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, both of which maintain a consistent and significant presence around the world. In the case of the Sisters of the Child Mary though, there existed a personal motive for their presence, given the close and solid relationship of Paul VI with the community, from whom he also drew his personal staff in the Vatican. On the other hand, the mother superior Costantina Baldinucci was also president of the Italian Federation of Religious Hospitaliers, and thus also represented a national organisation. Continental representation played a part in the case of others: I refer to Mary Luke Tobin, who was the president of the Conference of Superiors General of Female Institutions within, and thus representing, the USA. For yet others, as with the Egyptian Khouzam and the Palestinian Ghanem, the prevailing criteria was that of representing other rites in difficult mission territories (Coptic, Maronite, Greek Melkite, Syrian, Armenian, Chaldean). Similarly, Feddish and Chimy were summoned as exponents of Byzantine-rite communities; Claudia Feddish at the solicitation of Cardinal Josyf Slipyi, the powerful voice of the “Silent Church”, and Jerome Chimy at the intervention of Cardinal Gustavo Testa, secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Rites. Understanding the selection of Thomas and Estrada is a more complex matter. Juliana Thomas, secretary general of the Union of Mother-Superiors of Germany, was possibly summoned as a leading representative of German religious sisters, with consideration for the fact that her community suffered persecution under Nazism; Cristina Estrada I believe was summoned due to her personality and knowledge: she was an energetic and resolute woman, much loved in the Vatican for having ceded her vast property to the Holy See

for the erection of the Gemelli Hospital in Rome.

As the “Osservatore Romano” noted on the 24th September 1964: “The number might seem small, considering the multitude of religious women of all types and orders: but it remains a symbol of how much the Pope and the Hierarchy appreciate and respect the service so generously rendered by these women to the Church.”

The laywomen who were summoned were as follows:

1. Marie Louise *Monnet*, French, president of the International Movement of Apostolate in the Independent Social Milieus;
2. *Pilar Bellosillo*, Spanish, president of the World Union of Female Catholic Organizations;
3. *Rosemary Goldie*, Australian, executive secretary of the Permanent Committee of International Congresses for the Lay Apostolate;
4. *Anne-Marie Roeloffzen*, Dutch, secretary general of the World Federation of Female Catholic Youth, Italians and war widows;
5. *Amalia Dematteis*, Italian, widow of Cordero Lanza of Montezemolo, president of the Patrons for Spiritual Assistance to the Armed Forces;
6. *Ida Marengi-Marenco*, Italian, widow to Grillo,
7. *Alda Miceli*, president of the Italian Women’s Centre;
8. *Catherine McCarthy*, American, president of the National Council of Catholic Women;
9. *Luz Maria Longoria* and *Josè Alvarez Icaza Manero*, a Mexican couple, president of the Christian Family Movement;
10. *Margherita Moyano Llerena*, Argentinean, president of the World Federation of Female Catholic Youth;
11. *Gladys Parentelli*, from Uruguay, president of the Movement for Female Catholic Youth in Agriculture;
12. *Gertrud Ehrle*, German, president of the German Federation of Catholic Women;
13. *Hedwig von Skoda*, Czechoslovakian, president of the International Team for Christian Rebirth.

As with the religious women, various motives were at work in the selection of the laywomen. There always existed the desire to maintain representatives from international associations which had a wider presence in different parts of the world (in Europe, North America and Latin America, Australia). The exceptions to this criteria were the two war widows (Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo and Grillo), who were invited as ‘experts of life’ to represent the sacrifice made by women during the world wars ¹, the blind

baroness Hedwig Skoda, who was invited at the explicit request of Cardinal Josef Beran, Archbishop of Prague, and Gertrud Ehrle, whose presence was not only desired by Cardinal Agostino Bea, but also solicited by the vocal German episcopate. All were unmarried with the exception of the two war widows, widow McCarthy and Luz Maria Alvarez Icaza, who was summoned together with her husband Josè as a couple.

To these female observers must be added another twenty or so women, who were summoned as “experts” for their specific competences and professionalisms. They included the economist *Barbara Ward*, an international expert on problems pertaining to world hunger; *Patricia Crowley*, an authority on issues of birth control; and *Eileen Egan*, an advocate of non-violence and a pacifist, who was consulted on questions regarding war.

In the eyes of many of the Council Fathers, the presence of female observers was meant to be mostly symbolic; as it turned out, they were anything but symbolic, participating in the work of the committees with determination and competence.

Whilst their presence was limited at the last two sessions of the Council, it had a particularly lively and significant character in the third and fourth sessions (14th September to 21st November 1964, and 14th September to 8th December 1965 respectively), making important impressions on the Conciliar documents themselves.

The influence of the female observers was seen primarily in the two documents on which they had worked since the formation of the sub-committees: the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which emphasised the rejection of any sexual discrimination, and *Gaudium et Spes*, from which emerged a unitarian vision of man and woman as the “human person” and as fundamentally equal. We know of the authoritative interventions of some of the women (for example of Goldie, Bellosillo and Guillemin) who sought to affirm the overarching dignity of the human person over every specific consideration of the feminine, which, rather than being treated as a separate issue, they sought to liberate from confinements and limitations. The primacy of that fundamental parity conferred by baptism upon believers confers on everyone – including women – the principle of apostolic co-responsibility. The laity, both men and women, was no longer relegated to a passive role of receptivity, but received an active and important role in the Church.

Also of great importance was the surmounting of the traditional contractual and juridical concept of the family institution by means of a recovery of the fundamental value of conjugal love, founded on an “intimate communion of life and love.” With regard to this, the contribution of Luz Marie Alvarez

Icaza and her husband Josè in the sub-committee for *Gaudium et Spes* was crucial in changing the bishops' attitude vis-a-vis the conjugal sexual act. This underwent a transformation, from being considered as the "remedy for concupiscence" linked to sin, to being understood as an expression and act of love.

The important contribution of the economist Barbara Ward to the debate on the presence of the Church in the world must also be remembered, along with her efforts to ensure that the Church made a credible statement on the problem of poverty and on the subject of human development.

The religious female observers also played an important role in putting into practice the "renewal" of the religious life, triggering various innovative and experimental programmes. They had worked on re-centring the religious life on the person of Christ and on His message by means of a return to Biblical and liturgical sources, by highlighting the personal dignity of every member of a community, with a specific appraisal of the specificity and value of womanhood, and by proposing a different attitude for woman religious in relation to the world, which required a greater openness in order to respond to the many problems around justice, peace and liberty that were still in existence.

In conclusion, it can therefore be said that the significance of the Council for women goes well beyond the few explicit references that are made in its documents. It signalled the introduction of a new methodology of listening and of dialogue in relating to humanity's problems, whilst re-assigning to each person their dignity, recognising the kingly, prophetic and priestly functions in each of the baptised, and opening up new areas of responsibility and participation within the Church, without differentiating on the basis of sex, ethnicity or culture. The Council did not seek to define, but to open the doors to a world in transformation, asking the Church to renew and to update itself.

1 As noted in "Osservatore Romano", on September 24, 1964 (p.2), war widows were invited especially to honour those "women whose grief and pain is an eloquent condemnation of the war. At the same time, they are the symbol of the deepest aspirations of all humanity towards a just and Christian peace".

TO LOVE THE CHURCH¹

Cardinal Godfried Danneels

Cardinal Godfried Danneels is Archbishop of Malines-Brussels. He was president of the Belgian Episcopal Conference, a position he held until 2010. During the consistory of February 2nd, 1983 he was elevated to cardinal by Pope John Paul II.

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W

hen I think of the Church – and I have been in her service for more than 50 years -, I always return to this very well-known passage of the *Song of Songs*: “I am black and therefore beautiful [...]

Take no notice of my dark complexion, the sun has burnt me. The sons of my mother became angry with me and set me to watch over the vines. I have not taken care of my own vineyard.”² I love the Church, even if she sometimes has tested me as she has done with each of us. It happens, especially when one considers her history over the last 2000 years, that one finds the Church to be “black”. But she is beautiful. You have to discover her beauty beginning with her inner self. There has not been a single century of her history in which she has not been burnt by the sun from watching over the vines and she has never failed to remain beautiful. It has always been like this. The Church has known difficult moments and moments of glory. When she has suffered, for example at the time of the martyrs, she was red with blood, but she was beautiful. Appearances are deceptive, because one can understand the Church only through a sort of second vision added to our human sight. For we Christians see a beauty in sufferings and wounds and we have doubts when things go too well - for example during the of Constantine period, when the Church became more and more powerful. And in our day, too, the same impression prevails: the Church is black and at the same time she is beautiful.

A Time of Trial

Evidently, if one trusts the press and the media, it is clear that it is the blemishes and defects which are emphasized above all else.

Therefore, there are some very positive points in today's Church, despite all the rest. As regards the Bible, for example, scarcely fifty years ago, the Bible was not read, and today there is a Bible in many Christian homes (whether read or not). On the liturgical level, the Word of God put forward in Sunday celebrations is very different from fifty years ago; thus before the Council, people scarcely even read Saint John and now, they read through the entire Bible, or almost. As regards lay participation, the path followed is extraordinary. And then, what is truly remarkable over the last several years is the sense of inwardness and the return of spirituality - and for that matter used for all sorts of purposes: the spirituality of entrepreneurs, of horticulturists, of sportsmen as well as of the abbeys, which are always full — at least in the hostelry. Certainly, as early as the 1920's, the famous Romano Guardini spoke of the reawakening of the Church in individuals ³, which corresponded to general experience. And that has been largely confirmed, when in 1943, Pius XII published the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, on the mystical body of Christ, which initiated such a fertile period of spirituality. Thus, Action Catholique, flourishing at that particular time, was completely inspired by a profound sense of the Church. And then, shortly after the Council, the Church, which had been «awakened in individual souls», was as if it had fallen asleep once again. Today, one must have courage to love the Church, and to recognize her beauty. Yet, in the suffering of this Church «burnt by the sun», there is always something mysterious. It is without doubt a suffering of which we ourselves are sometimes the cause. But how can we explain the suffering of the Church solely by our failings? We must recognize this resistance to the idea that, out in the world or within ourselves, something beautiful is taking place. For in secret, all that goes well is habitually denigrated. It is a sort of reflex which we have kept, as a consequence of original sin. Something mysterious is taking place: we seek that which is just, because it is just. It is even said in the Bible, in the Book of Wisdom, that what is just, must be put to the test; we wish to set a trap for it so that it will fall. ⁴ I believe that even if all the members of the Church, the Pope, the bishops, the priests, the deacons, the religious of both genders in the entire world, and all the other faithful were perfect, the Church would still not be recognized as perfect. There is something in us and in the world which resists that.

One says rather easily that everything is going badly in the Church in our time, and I wonder how the Church, and Christians especially, felt in the 16th

century. The internal division in each parish must have been an enormous shock of insecurity and pain. We are no longer in that time or situation, but nevertheless, the institution is in crisis. Doubtlessly there is part of the institution which is not yet in crisis, but all authority is rather quickly viewed as oppression. Moreover, we speak much about the social side of things, but we are very individualistic, even in our spirituality: «between me and my Creator, there is no intermediary; I know full well how I must act with God, the Church must not tell me how to do so». We also note a fear of asserting how things stand; there is always a «maybe» in our support, for if we assert things in clear fashion, it is understood as pretension. If you put a note of confidence in your preaching or your message, you will end up appearing as intolerant: «by what right do you speak to me about what is true? I have a right to my truth; you must respect me, therefore stay silent...».

Furthermore, usual concepts are not applicable as such in the Church; they are a bit off-the-rack in which the Church feels ill at ease⁵. For example, when one speaks of authority, the Church affirms, the service is authority; if one speaks of managing, the Church retorts: it is love. When the Church speaks of the law, it means that the supreme law is love. Because participation in the Church does not exclude the authority of the hierarchy, and democracy is not transferrable to the Church: responsibilities cannot go against the office of the bishops and of the Pope.

The Mystery of the Church

Yet these remain superficial considerations. The true reason for our difficulties, is that something unreal and unthinkable occurred in the history of men: God became small, God, who is great, majestic, wise, powerful became man. We are so used to saying that “God became man in Jesus Christ” that we do not think what an absurdity that can be; many of us today, Jews especially, cannot accept that God became man and so small. This is the mystery of Incarnation; other religions often speak of a god without substance and hence distant, a sort of vital energy. In the valley of the Nile in Assuan, Luxor and Karnak, there are enormous statues cut from the rock, that are stylized and hieratic, which gaze beyond the Nile and are silent, as the psalm says. But our God, so great is he, has become so small. And the Church is involved in the same mystery: she is both immensely important and so human - too human, Nietzsche would say.

The Church is at once visible and invisible, but the invisible Church becomes visible: she is there where the parish priest and the community gather as on the day of Pentecost. We can understand the Church only when we have a sort of sensory organ which can see the visible and the invisible

at the same time. We need human eyes and the perceptive eye of our faith: the Church is incomprehensible outside this insight of faith; this is why we say in the *Credo*: “I believe in the Church that is one, holy, universal and apostolic.”

Because the Church is very visible, we say: this is beautiful to hear, but is it true? There is God, there is Christ, there is the Church, there are the sacraments, there is the hierarchy, there is the Eucharist. And the closer you come - and the Eucharist is very close by, there on the altar -, the more difficult it is to believe. During conversion, one comes first to God, then to Christ, then to the hierarchy, then the sacraments and finally to the Eucharist. And when one loses his faith, one goes in the opposite direction. One begins to no longer believe in the Eucharist, then in the hierarchy, then in the Church, then in Christ and finally one becomes an atheist, one no longer believes in God. Furthermore, when one wishes to speak of the mystery of the Church, visible and invisible, a few concepts cannot suffice. These concepts are always precise, sometimes concrete, but can mean only one thing. Yet, when one speaks of the Church, one has to always affirm both the visible and the invisible. What can express two truths at the same time? Only images have this capacity to suggest several things at once. If one designates water using an unambiguous concept, one will say H²O. But that does not indicate the cool freshness of water. Besides, in the Bible, but also in the sacraments, water suggests two different and opposite things: it is both fecund, giving life, and deadly, because one can drown in water. It attracts and at the same time it repels, because it expresses both death and life. To baptize in water means both to cause the sinner to die and to give grace and life.

Thus, when one mentions the Church, it is not enough to simply refer to institution, hierarchy, or authority; these terms are insufficient. One needs completely ordinary images: Noah’s ark, the flood, creation, the four rivers of paradise.... Or images taken from the life of the shepherd: the herd, the flock, the shepherd himself. Or from the world of agriculture: the Church is the field of God and the orchard of God. Or from the field of construction: she is the Temple or the family house; she is a town, but one where it is pleasant to live, as the psalm says. Or there are the images of marriage, of man and woman, husband and wife: the Church is the “Spouse of Christ.” This way one cannot speak of the Church without images, except when one has to explain things in detail. One need not read a manual of theology to feel something of the Church, one must use images, as the Fathers of the Church did and Saint Paul before them.

It is useless to dream of a perfect Church. One must leave the Church her human side. That is not pleasant, often due to ourselves. How difficult it can

be to believe in the invisible Church, something I have often had to face. Therefore, she is “black” and she is “beautiful”. This Church commits her errors, yet it is the Church of Christ. Yes, it is hard to believe. Is it easier to believe in Christ? Ah, open your eyes. There is in Christ the same mystery of the visible and invisible. How is it that God can speak only Aramean? Why is it that he came 2000 years ago and not now in the age of the internet? Why those voyages across the sea and all those centuries have passed before the Gospel reaches the edges of the earth? That I do not know. Saint Paul also took some time before discerning this visible Church. When one reads the first epistles, such as the first one to the Corinthians, one sees that Paul was very involved in what was happening in his “parishes” of Corinth, Thessalonica and Rome. Paul is always concerned with immediate questions, in a way like the problems of a parish priest who must settle his affairs. And it is much later, when he is in captivity and not accomplishing much, that he looks further ahead, but with a deeper awareness, in the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, where he speaks of the Church as Spouse of Christ. Paul had to in some way grow old before becoming accustomed to seeing that what is essential in the Church is invisible. Perhaps in our lives, too, it is only when we grow old that our perception becomes more inward...

A Mystical Body

Why then is this fury so strong that one sees unleashed against the Church and religion (but especially against the Church)? I believe this violence done to the Church can be explained only because one feels that somewhere behind this visible façade with its defects, there is something deeper. If the Church and faith were only an illusion, why have Christians been put to death in our time, one every five minutes? Because there is something behind the visible which is much more important: the Church is the mystical Body of Christ.

Which does not mean unreal, imaginary body. “Mystical Body” means that between the low and the high, the visible and the invisible, there exists a mysterious union. It is not allegorical, it is not metaphorical, it is not a simple comparison with the body, it is not about a moral body, it is not a gathering around the historical figure that is Jesus. One must not dilute the reality of the mystical Body with the imaginary. “Mystical” means that there is a mysterious union between Christ risen, Son of God, and his Church. Our belief is that the Church is certainly not Christ, but that they are inseparable one from the other and one must not dilute the Body with the imaginary nature of allegory. Each time that we finds a failing, something that does not go well, from defects or deficiencies, we need to renew our faith in the

Church - which is not the same as refusing to see our faults.

Our Mother

Perhaps the most beautiful name that the Church has is the name “Mother”. A mother gives life, and we need a mother. In a certain period of time, we knew some tendencies, especially in Protestantism, where faith was almost reduced to philosophy. The great thinkers of the 19th century in Germany, following Hegel for example, confined the Church to the world of ideology. But then, “ideas do not have a mother”, said K. Rahner, they are products of the spirit. They are missing something physical, something of the body, something very warm. Because it accepts the role of the Mother of God in redemption, (and not simply in her role as the biological mother of Jesus), we are perhaps not sufficiently aware of what Catholicism brings to our religion. The word “warmth” is perhaps preferable when speaking of the maternal side of the humanity of Catholicism. We can exaggerate, as when Mary almost overshadows Christ, in the minds of the faithful. But Mary kept Catholicism within a profound humanism.

If we do not understand this maternity of the Virgin Mary, we will never really understand the Church. And those who do not like the Church, will not love Mary. When one truly loves the Church, that love always has a Marian tinge or almost always. Marian love and love of the Church have the same quality. It is a love where the body enters in with the mind and the heart. It is probably true of all Churches, but the Catholic Church in particular has something feminine about it. Besides, in almost all languages the word “Church” is grammatically feminine. Let’s say then that there is in this, a type of maternal femininity, a profoundness and warmth which is inexplicable without the Virgin Mary. And there is something very beautiful in that. I enjoy being in this Church where there exists this profound sentiment of maternity, femininity, finesse, calm, comprehension, and consolation, which always stresses the positive side of things: to not give the law only, but to be the gateway of the new mercy. God is mercy, and Christ, too, certainly, but the “Mother of Mercy”, that is the claim to fame of the Virgin Mary.

Man or Woman of the Church

There exists a type of man, of human being, that one designates, in the good sense of the word, as men or women of the Church. The man of the Church, the *homo ecclesiasticus*, is a type of man (or woman) that one recognizes immediately. When one says to someone: “blessed are the poor, blessed are the gentle, blessed are those who are persecuted in the name of justice, blessed are they who are patient, blessed are they who are pure in

heart...”, and that delights him, there is a Christian. Because by nature we do not like poverty, we would say, “blessed are the rich, blessed are those who are in the right, blessed are those who say: we have to act and not be too patient; it is about winning one’s cause, and not allowing oneself to be persecuted. But the Christian is the man of bliss, the one who is delighted by the message that one sees fulfilled in Saint Francis of Assisi. He is the person who has what I would call minor, latent needs. The need to possess, to know, to command, etc., are primary needs. But there are other needs which are in a certain manner in our blood, and which make us happy, like Francis of Assisi. Poverty gives a lesser joy that we need to awaken.

To be a man or woman of the Church means having a strong loyalty toward it. What it does not mean is to overlook its defects, but to be loyal in spite of them. A loyalty that costs nothing is not a true loyalty, but a natural gift or almost one. This type of man loves the history of the Church and, without a nostalgia for a supposed golden age, he looks upon this history with a certain feeling. Yet we study much too little of the Church’s history. Beyond the crusades or the inquisition, there are other times which are truly remarkable. For example, when Saint Bernard entered Citeaux with some thirty family members. They were noble knights who had known all sorts of things in their lives. On the death of Saint Bernard a few years later, there were more than a thousand abbeys in Europe founded or inspired by him. In the same period the great mystics of the Middle Ages, often women, have left us some amazing literature....We linger too little on the history of the Church, because she is “black” at certain moments. But she is “beautiful”, too, and we will have to recognize that more than we do.

Tradition and Authority

The man of the Church then has a sense of tradition, but also a sense of authority. I recall Pope John Paul II. I sometimes went to see him, when I was still young and I dared to say to him; “Holy Father there are, however, some things which are not going well.” And John Paul II never replied; he listened and then at the end after my exposé he said, Mmm, Mmm, Mmm... And I saw his expression say (although he did not actually say it directly): this one has a lot to learn still. Jean Paul II was enormously accessible. One could say anything to him, and in the end he replied, mysteriously, Mmm, Mmm, Mmm.

A man of the Church is still someone who loves Fathers. For Newman, the Fathers of the Church are more mothers than fathers in matters of faith; “In this Church of Fathers, I recognized my spiritual Mother... The renouncement of these ascetics, the patience of her martyrs, the compelling

determination of her bishops, the joyous energy of her forward march inspired me and confused me at the same time.”⁶ It was written at the moment when he was still anglican, before his conversion. What have the Fathers of the Church to do with this? First and foremost because they lived closer to Christ than we. They are not concerned with rationality in texts as would be modern exegetes. But they have a sense of images that we not longer have. In their mystagogic catechetics they explain about baptism, for example, that when Moses threw his rod into the bitter waters, which then became sweet, this rod had been made of the same wood as the cross. Or again that the Church is Noah’s ark which dances on the waves. And that the olive branch is Christ’s victory over the flood. All the figures from the Old Testament that are in the catacombs and in the mosaics of the great Roman basilicas or in the baptisteries are a reading of these signs in the faith. To sample the charm of the Fathers of the Church, we evidently need a certain basic introduction, but they are the fathers and mothers of our souls, the fathers and mothers of the Church.

A Welcome of Everyone

A member of the Church also has a sense of solidarity, humility and much comprehension. Sometimes, when unusual things happen in the Church, I have a desire to do as John Paul II did: Mmm! I am not saying I approve of everything. But we are men and the Church is human. When one loves the Church, one accepts differences of mentality and sensibility. In the Church there can be some Peters, some Pauls, and some Jameses, some Andrews and Philips, who have sensitivity and a different mentality, but who all belong to the Church. One needs Peter to give stability to the Church; he is the helmsman of the ship. Not everyone can be the helmsman, but we do need one. On the contrary, Paul embodies the adaptability of the Church, which permits us always to perceive the signs of the times and to immediately grasp their meaning: that is what we must do. This is Saint Paul and is in no way Saint Peter. Saint John is the warmth in the Church, the fire, the flame, the prayer. We need a John. There are some like James in the Church. Let’s say they are the ones who study canon law. We need rules in the Church. This is not a very stirring subject and it can in fact be rather tedious when the rules become preponderant, but we need people like James, too. And Philip and Andrew are the logistics, those who find the bread and little fish for the miracle of the bread and fishes. And there and those who led the Greeks to Jesus, just before his Passion. A man of the Church has respect for those like Peter, Paul, James, Philip and Andrew... There are different types in the Church and a variety of feelings and views, theological and otherwise, and we need all of them.

The Love of Simple Folk, and Above All, Hope

A man of the Church is also someone who understands the simple folk in the Church and loves those people of modest means who go on pilgrimage to Montaigu, Banneux or Beauraing and whose simplicity of faith is conspicuously on display. One day in a place on the pilgrimage, where there were bulletin boards for putting up announcements, I saw two pieces of paper one next to the other. On one was written, “Virgin Mary, bring me back my husband”, a serious matter. And beside it there was: “Virgin Mary, my little dog has run off, bring him back to me”. There is a big difference between them, but it is such a truth. A man of the Church respects that and, sometimes, he plunges into popular piety and in any case he esteems it.

Some wonder if the Church always makes just decisions. Perhaps not, but God writes on crooked lines. In any case, the Church does not tear the seamless tunic, just as next to Jesus on the cross the Roman soldiers did not do it. The man of the Church does not put himself in opposition, he does not harm the unity of the Church; not that he fails to accept everything for the good of peace”, but because it is convenient in his place as sailor to always be inspired by hope. And a sailor never loses the hope of arriving safely in port, even if the horizon seems to be ever receding. One can lose faith, which is serious, but one can regain it; it is not rare today. How many people 40 or 50 years old rediscover faith! They took leave from faith, yet when their child does his first communion, they return to it. When one loses his faith, let us say he has a cardiac arrhythmia, an extra systole. It is not pleasant, but it is not lethal. When one loses one’s sense of charity, it is more serious. Let’s say he is having a heart attack, but survivors today go jogging. But when one loses hope, it is heart failure and death. That is why Satan always tries to entice saints at the end of their lives, not against their faith or their charity, but against their sense of hope, like Saint Therese of Lisieux, tested at the end of her life by her difficulty in believing in life eternal. It is not for nothing that, in the “I greet you, Mary” we say, “pray for us, poor sinners, now and at the hour of our death.” When I was small, I said to myself: to die, that is not yet “now”, why then are we already saying “at the hour of my death”? In the work of Bernanos, *The Journal of a Country Priest*, the great ordeal of a young priest is to lose all hope. The young country priest at the very end of the book, while he is going to the doctor’s house, must stop at the home of a defrocked friend. It is in this friend’s bed that he dies. And the friend, after his death writes to the parish priest of Torcy: “just before his death, I heard him say: ‘all is grace, I think.’” It is a quote from the young Therese just at the moment she sees herself dying without the last rites.

Conclusion

One could end with the famous utterance of Joan of Arc before her judges. This untutored young woman had some astonishing turns of phrase, notably “on Jesus Christ and the Church it is my opinion that it is of one piece, and one must not make a problem of it.” Thus we can love the Church at all times like the cardinal of Lubac in a remarkable book on the Church, edited at the time when Rome had forbidden him from teaching.

It is possible that many things in the human context of the Church mislead us. It is possible also that we are, without it being our fault, profoundly misunderstood. It is possible that even in his bosom, we must suffer persecution. The case is not unreal, although it fails to avoid applying it presumptuously to us. Loving patience and silence will be worth then more than anything... we will think that the Church gives us Jesus Christ more than in those occasions where she offers us to be shaped by his passion... Let's be happy if we buy at the price of the blood of our soul, this intimate experience which will empower our message, when we tell some disturbed brother to whom we are giving sustenance, using the words of Saint John Chrysostom, “Do not separate yourself at all from the Church! No power has its strength. The Church is your hope. The Church is your health. The Church is your refuge. She is higher than the sky and broader than the earth. She never ages, her vigor is eternal.”⁷

¹ Speech (of which we preserve the oral style) at the session of the same name, given in the *Centre Spirituel Notre-Dame de la Justice de Rhode-Sain-Genève*, on June 12, 2011. We thank the Cardinal and his organizers for having entrusted its publication to us.

² Translation from the New Jerusalem Bible.

³ “A religious event of immense range is in the process of unfolding: the Church is experiencing an awakening in the soul of its members.” This is the beginning of an

article from the journal *Hochland*, of 1921 and reprinted in *Vom Sinn der Kirche* 1, 1922.

⁴ Sg 2, 12 ff Bible Commentaries.

⁵ According to Merleau-Ponty in «*Foi et bonne foi*» for example, the Christian, whether or not he is a «bad conservative», is also an «unsure revolutionary» (in *Sens et non sens*, 1948, 315-316).

⁶ *Apologia pro vita sua*, Ad Solem editions, Geneva 2003, 166.

⁷ *Méditation sur l'Église*. 184 ff.

NAVIGATING THE SHIFTS

Sr. Pat Farrell, OSF

Sister Pat Farrell, a Franciscan, is president of the LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious), which comprises 80% of the female major superiors of the United States. Having considered the “doctrinal evaluation” received from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, she delivered the following speech to 900 female religious gathered in assembly, on the 10th August 2012, at St. Louis, Missouri.

Presidential Address, LCWR Assembly 2012

Original in English

The address that I am about to give is not the one I had imagined. After the lovely contemplative tone of last summer’s assembly, I had anticipated simply articulating from our contemporary religious life reflections some of the new things we sense that God has been doing. Well, indeed we have been sensing new things. The doctrinal assessment, however, is not what I had in mind!

Clearly, there has been a shift! Some larger movement in the Church, in the world, has landed on LCWR. We are in a time of crisis and that is a very hopeful place to be. As our main speaker, Barbara Marx Hubbard, has indicated, crisis precedes transformation. It would seem that an ecclesial and even cosmic transformation is trying to break through. In the doctrinal assessment we’ve been given an opportunity to help move it. We weren’t looking for this controversy. Yet I don’t think that it is by accident that it found us. No, there is just too much synchronicity in events that have prepared us for it. The apostolic visitation galvanized the solidarity among us. Our contemplative group reflection has been ripening our spiritual depth. The 50th anniversary of the Vatican II approaches. How significant for us who took it so to heart and have been so shaped by it! It makes us recognize with poignant clarity what a very different moment this is. I find my prayer these days often taking the form of lamentation. Yes, something has shifted! And now, here we are, in the eye of an ecclesial storm, with a spotlight shining on us and a microphone placed at our mouths. What invitation, what opportunity, what responsibility is ours in this? Our LCWR mission statement reminds us that our time is holy, our leadership is gift, and our challenges are blessings.

I think it would be a mistake to make too much of the doctrinal assessment. We cannot allow it to consume an inordinate amount of our time and energy or to distract us from our mission. It is not the first time that a form of religious life has collided with the institutional Church. Nor will it be the last. We've seen an apostolic visitation, the Quinn Commission, a Vatican intervention of CLAR and of the Jesuits. Many of the foundresses and founders of our congregations struggled long for canonical approval of our institutes. Some were even silenced or ex-communicated. A few of them, as in the cases of Mary Ward and Mary McKillop, were later canonized. There is an inherent existential tension between the complementary roles of hierarchy and religious which is not likely to change. In an ideal ecclesial world, the different roles are held in creative tension, with mutual respect and appreciation, in an environment of open dialogue, for the building up of the whole Church. The doctrinal assessment suggests that we are not currently living in an ideal ecclesial world.

I also think it would be a mistake to make too little of the doctrinal assessment. The historical impact of this moment is clear to all of us. It is reflected in the care with which LCWR members have both responded and not responded, in an effort to speak with one voice. We have heard it in more private conversations with concerned priests and bishops. It is evident in the immense groundswell of support from our brother religious and from the laity. Clearly they share our concern at the intolerance of dissent even from those with informed consciences, the continued curtailing of the role of women. Here are selections from one of the many letters I have received: "I am writing to you because I am watching at this pivotal moment in our planet's spiritual history. I believe that all the Catholic faithful must be enlisted in your efforts, and that this crisis be treated as the 21st century catalyst for open debate and a rush of fresh air through every stained glass window in the land." Yes, much is at stake. Through it all, we can only go forward with truthfulness and integrity. Hopefully we can do so in a way that contributes to the good of religious life everywhere and to the healing of the fractured Church we so love. It is no simple thing. We walk a fine line. Gratefully, we walk it together. In the context of Barbara Marx Hubbard's presentation, it is easy to see this LCWR moment as a microcosm of a world in flux. It is nested within the very large and comprehensive paradigm shift of our day. The cosmic breaking down and breaking through we are experiencing gives us a broader context. Many institutions, traditions, and structures seem to be withering. Why? I believe the philosophical underpinnings of the way we've organized reality no longer hold. The human family is not served by individualism, patriarchy, a scarcity mentality, or competition. The world is outgrowing the dualistic constructs of superior/inferior, win/lose, good/bad, and domination/submission. Breaking through in their place are equality, communion, collaboration, synchronicity, expansiveness, abundance, wholeness, mutuality, intuitive knowing, and love.

This shift, while painful, is good news! It heralds a hopeful future for our Church and our world. As a natural part of evolutionary advance, it in no way negates or undervalues what went before. Nor is there reason to be fearful of the cataclysmic movements of change swirling around us. We only need to recognize the movement, step into the flow, and be carried by it. Indeed, all creation is groaning in one great act of giving birth. The Spirit of God still hovers over the chaos. This familiar poem of Christopher Fry captures it:

*“The human heart can go the length of God.
Cold and dark, it may be
But this is no winter now.
The frozen misery of centuries cracks, breaks, begins to move.
The thunder is the thunder of the floes.
The thaw, the flood, the up-start spring.
Thank God, our time is now
When wrong comes up to face us everywhere
Never to leave until we take
The greatest stride of soul that people ever took
Affairs are now soul-size.
The enterprise is exploration into God...”*
– Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Strangers*

I would like to suggest a few ways for us to navigate the large and small changes we are undergoing. God is calling to us from the future. I believe we are being readied for a fresh inbreaking of the Reign of God. What can prepare us for that? Perhaps there are answers within our own spiritual DNA. Tools that have served us through centuries of religious life are, I believe, still a compass to guide us now. Let us consider a few, one by one.

How can we navigate the shifts? Through contemplation.

How else can we go forward except from a place of deep prayer? Our vocations, our lives, begin and end in the desire for God. We have a lifetime of being lured into union with divine Mystery. That Presence is our truest home. The path of contemplation we’ve been on together is our surest way into the darkness of God’s leading. In situations of impasse, it is only prayerful spaciousness that allows what wants to emerge to manifest itself. We are at such an impasse now. Our collective wisdom needs to be gathered. It germinates in silence, as we saw during the six weeks following the issuing of the mandate from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. We wait for God to carve out a deeper knowing in us. With Jan Richardson we pray: “You hollow us out, God, so that we may carry you, and you endlessly fill us only to be emptied again. Make smooth our inward spaces and sturdy, that we may hold you with less resistance and bear you with deeper grace.”

Here is one image of contemplation: the prairie. The roots of prairie grass are extraordinarily deep. Prairie grass actually enriches the land. It produced the fertile soil of the Great Plains. The deep roots aerate the soil and decompose into rich, productive earth. Interestingly, a healthy prairie needs to be burned regularly. It needs the heat of the fire and the clearing away of the grass itself to bring the nutrients from the deep roots to the surface, supporting new growth. This burning reminds me of a similar image. There is a kind of Eucalyptus tree in Australia whose seeds cannot germinate without a forest fire. The intense heat cracks open the seed and allows it to grow. Perhaps with us, too, there are deep parts of ourselves activated only when more shallow layers are stripped away. We are pruned and purified in the dark night. In both contemplation and conflict we are mulched into fertility. As the burning of the prairie draws energy from the roots upward and outward, contemplation draws us toward fruitful action. It is the seedbed of a prophetic life. Through it, God shapes and strengthens us for what is needed now.

How can we navigate the shifts? With a prophetic voice

The vocation of religious life is prophetic and charismatic by nature, offering an alternate lifestyle to that of the dominant culture. The call of Vatican II, which we so conscientiously heeded, urged us to respond to the signs of our times. For fifty years women religious in the United States have been trying to do so, to be a prophetic voice. There is no guarantee, however, that simply by virtue of our vocation we can be prophetic. Prophecy is both God's gift as well as the product of rigorous asceticism. Our rootedness in God needs to be deep enough and our read on reality clear enough for us to be a voice of conscience.

It is usually easy to recognize the prophetic voice when it is authentic. It has the freshness and freedom of the Gospel: open, and favoring the disenfranchised. The prophetic voice dares the truth. We can often hear in it a questioning of established power, and an uncovering of human pain and unmet need. It challenges structures that exclude some and benefit others. The prophetic voice urges action and a choice for change.

Considering again the large and small shifts of our time, what would a prophetic response to the doctrinal assessment look like? I think it would be humble, but not submissive; rooted in a solid sense of ourselves, but not self-righteous; truthful, but gentle and absolutely fearless. It would ask probing questions. Are we being invited to some appropriate pruning, and would we open to it? Is this doctrinal assessment process an expression of concern or an attempt to control? Concern is based in love and invites unity. Control through fear and intimidation would be an abuse of power. Does the institutional legitimacy of canonical recognition empower us to live prophetically? Does it allow us the freedom to question with informed consciences? Does it really welcome feedback

in a Church that claims to honor the *sensus fidelium*, *the sense of the faithful*? In the words of Bob Beck, “A social body without a mechanism for registering dissent is like a physical body that cannot feel pain. There is no way to get feedback that says that things are going wrong. Just as a social body that includes little more than dissent is as disruptive as a physical body that is in constant pain. Both need treatment.”

When I think of the prophetic voice of LCWR, specifically, I recall the statement on civil discourse from our 2011 assembly. In the context of the doctrinal assessment, it speaks to me now in a whole new way. St. Augustine expressed what is needed for civil discourse with these words:

“Let us, on both sides, lay aside all arrogance. Let us not, on either side, claim that we have already discovered the truth. Let us seek it together as something which is known to neither of us. For then only may we seek it, lovingly and tranquilly, if there be no bold presumption that it is already discovered and possessed.”

In a similar vein, what would a prophetic response to the larger paradigm shifts of our time look like? I hope it would include both openness and critical thinking, while also inspiring hope. We can claim the future we desire and act from it now. To do this takes the discipline of choosing where to focus our attention. If our brains, as neuroscience now suggests, take whatever we focus on as an invitation to make it happen, then the images and visions we live with matter a great deal. So we need to actively engage our imaginations in shaping visions of the future. Nothing we do is insignificant. Even a very small conscious choice of courage or of conscience can contribute to the transformation of the whole. It might be, for instance, the decision to put energy into that which seems most authentic to us, and withdraw energy and involvement from that which doesn't. This kind of intentionality is what Joanna Macy calls active hope. It is both creative and prophetic. In this difficult, transitional time, the future is in need of our imagination and our hopefulness. In the words of the French poet Rostand:

“It is at night that it is important to believe in the light; one must force the dawn to be borne by believing in it.”

How can we navigate the shifts? Through solidarity with the marginalized.

We cannot live prophetically without proximity to those who are vulnerable and marginalized. First of all, that is where we belong. Our mission is to give ourselves away in love, particularly to those in greatest need. This is who we are as women religious. But also, the vantage point of marginal people is a privileged place of encounter with God, whose preference is always for the outcast. There

is important wisdom to be gleaned from those on the margins. Vulnerable human beings put us more in touch with the truth of our limited and messy human condition, marked as it is by fragility, incompleteness, and inevitable struggle. The experience of God from that place is one of absolutely gratuitous mercy and empowering love. People on the margins who are less able to and less invested in keeping up appearances, often have an uncanny ability to name things as they are. Standing with them can help situate us in the truth and helps keep us honest. We need to see what they see in order to be prophetic voices for our world and Church, even as we struggle to balance our life on the periphery with fidelity to the center.

Collectively women religious have immense and varied experiences of ministry at the margins. Has it not been the privilege of our lives to stand with oppressed peoples? Have they not taught us what they have learned in order to survive: resiliency, creativity, solidarity, the energy of resistance, and joy? Those who live daily with loss can teach us how to grieve and how to let go. They also help us see when letting go is not enough. There are structures of injustice and exclusion that need to be unmasked and systematically removed. I offer this image of active dismantling. These pictures were taken in Suchitoto, El Salvador the day of celebration of the peace accords. That morning, people came out of their homes with sledge hammers and began to knock down the bunkers, to dismantle the machinery of war.

How can we navigate the shifts? Through community

Religious have navigated many shifts over the years because we've done it together. We find such strength in each other! In the last fifty years since Vatican II our way of living community has shifted dramatically. It has not been easy and continues to evolve, within the particular US challenge of creating community in an individualistic culture. Nonetheless, we have learned invaluable lessons.

We who are in positions of leadership are constantly challenged to honor a wide spectrum of opinions. We have learned a lot about creating community from diversity, and about celebrating differences. We have come to trust divergent opinions as powerful pathways to greater clarity. Our commitment to community compels us to do that, as together we seek the common good.

We have effectively moved from a hierarchically structured lifestyle in our congregations to a more horizontal model. It is quite amazing, considering the rigidity from which we evolved. The participative structures and collaborative leadership models we have developed have been empowering, lifegiving. These models may very well be the gift we now bring to the Church and the world.

From an evolved experience of community, our understanding of obedience has also changed. This is of particular importance to us as we discern a response

to the doctrinal assessment. How have we come to understand what free and responsible obedience means? A response of integrity to the mandate needs to come out of our own understanding of creative fidelity. Dominican Judy Schaefer has beautifully articulated theological underpinnings of what she calls “obedience in community” or “attentive discipleship.” They reflect our post-Vatican II lived experience of communal discernment and decision making as a faithful form of obedience. She says: “Only when all participate actively in attentive listening can the community be assured that it has remained open and obedient to the fullness of God’s call and grace in each particular moment in history.” Isn’t that what we have been doing at this assembly? Community is another compass as we navigate our way forward. Our world has changed. I celebrate that with you through the poetic words of Alice Walker, from her book entitled *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*:

The World Has Changed
*The world has changed:
 Wake up
 smell the possibility.
 The world has changed:
 It did not change
 without your prayers
 without your determination
 to believe in liberation
 kindness;
 without your dancing
 through the years
 that had no beat.
 The world has changed:
 It did not change
 without your numbers
 your fierce love
 of self cosmos
 it did not change
 without your strength.
 The world has changed:
 Wake up!
 Give yourself the gift
 of a new day.*

How can we navigate the shifts? Non-violently

The breaking down and breaking through of massive paradigm shift is a

violent sort of process. It invites the inner strength of a non-violent response. Jesus is our model in this. His radical inclusivity incited serious consequences. He was violently rejected as a threat to the established order. Yet he defined no one as enemy and loved those who persecuted him. Even in the apparent defeat of crucifixion, Jesus was no victim. He stood before Pilate declaring his power to lay down his life, not to have it taken from him.

What, then, does non-violence look like for us? It is certainly not the passivity of the victim. It entails resisting rather than colluding with abusive power. It does mean, however, accepting suffering rather than passing it on. It refuses to shame, blame, threaten or demonize. In fact, non-violence requires that we befriend our own darkness and brokenness rather than projecting it onto another. This, in turn, connects us with our fundamental oneness with each other, even in conflict. Non-violence is creative. It refuses to accept ultimatums and dead-end definitions without imaginative attempts to reframe them. When needed, I trust we will name and resist harmful behavior, without retaliation. We can absorb a certain degree of negativity without drama or fanfare, choosing not to escalate or lash out in return. My hope is that at least some measure of violence can stop with us.

Here I offer the image of a lightning rod. Lightning, the electrical charge generated by the clash of cold and warm air, is potentially destructive to whatever it strikes. A lightning rod draws the charge to itself, channels and grounds it, providing protection. A lightning rod doesn't hold onto the destructive energy but allows it to flow into the earth to be transformed.

How can we navigate the shifts? By living in joyful hope

Joyful hope is the hallmark of genuine discipleship. We look forward to a future full of hope, in the face of all evidence to the contrary. Hope makes us attentive to signs of the inbreaking of the Reign of God. Jesus describes that coming reign in the parable of the mustard seed.

Let us consider for a moment what we know about mustard. Though it can also be cultivated, mustard is an invasive plant, essentially a weed. The image you see is a variety of mustard that grows in the Midwest. Some exegetes tell us that when Jesus talks about the tiny mustard seed growing into a tree so large that the birds of the air come and build their nest in it, he is probably joking. To imagine birds building nests in the floppy little mustard plant is laughable. It is likely that Jesus' real meaning is something like *Look, don't imagine that in following me you're going to look like some lofty tree. Don't expect to be Cedars of Lebanon or anything that looks like a large and respectable empire. But even the floppy little mustard plant can support life.* Mustard, more often than not, is a weed. Granted, it's a beautiful and medicinal weed. Mustard is flavorful and has wonderful healing properties. It can be harvested for healing, and its greatest

value is in that. But mustard is usually a weed. It crops up anywhere, without permission. And most notably of all, it is uncontainable. It spreads prolifically and can take over whole fields of cultivated crops. You could even say that this little nuisance of a weed was illegal in the time of Jesus. There were laws about where to plant it in an effort to keep it under control.

Now, what does it say to us that Jesus uses this image to describe the Reign of God? Think about it. We can, indeed, live in joyful hope because there is no political or ecclesiastical herbicide that can wipe out the movement of God’s Spirit. Our hope is in the absolutely uncontainable power of God. We who pledge our lives to a radical following of Jesus can expect to be seen as pesty weeds that need to be fenced in. If the weeds of God’s Reign are stomped out in one place they will crop up in another. I can hear, in that, the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero “If I am killed, I will arise in the Salvadoran people.”

And so, we live in joyful hope, willing to be weeds one and all. We stand in the power of the dying and rising of Jesus. I hold forever in my heart an expression of that from the days of the dictatorship in Chile: “Pueden aplastar algunas flores, pero no pueden detener la primavera.” “They can crush a few flowers but they can’t hold back the springtime.”

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NOVICES? WHAT NOVICES?

Fr. Jean Claude Lavigne OP

Jean Claude Lavigne is a Dominican friar and former Director General of the “Économie et humanisme” association and current assistant to the Prior Provincial of the French Dominicans. He has a wide experience of religious life (including in a small community of handicapped people and various convents in France and Africa, both as a superior and formator). He gives conferences for various different movements within the Church, runs workshops for Chapters and preaches retreats for many monasteries and religious communities.

Original in French

One of the first questions that two superiors from different European congregations are bound to ask one another when they meet is: “How many novices?” in much the same way as generals might ask “How many tanks?” We have there an illustration of one of the major concerns of religious life in Europe: the future of congregations. We certainly have to ask ourselves about the young Europeans who aren’t joining us to understand why we are no longer welcoming novices, and what we can do to attract new ones, but it is even more imperative to understand the type of other relationships which it is possible to form between congregations and the young. It’s less about undertaking sociological studies on young candidates for religious life, which can never be exhaustive, than about understanding, above and beyond the split between the contemplative-apostolic and the intellectual-practical, which young people are interested in which community and which are not. It’s this link that is important and that will determine for the most part the future of the congregation which the young people available will provide. Therefore, we need to try to comprehend which situations will and will not permit, *le greffage*, or “grafting”.¹

“To graft” is a horticultural term designating the procedure of implanting the tissue or segment of one plant onto another, or onto a different area of the same, in order to allow the second to continue to grow by becoming one body with the first. In such a way, life goes on and leads to new fruit. The time of initial formation is the time of grafting, of bringing the old and traditional,

together with the new and modern. Some grafts do not take and some of their results lead to new fruits some of which are rather bitter and later regretted. The image applies well to our congregations: with our different young generations (the great heterogeneity of which should dissuade us from generalising too much in describing them) coming into religious life, there are often new waves of dynamism, but also sometimes a drifting off course, failures, bitterness. The different young people who join us rarely shape up to our desires and the price of integrating them seems too high to some, whereas for others, it is a joyful sacrifice to make.

We should therefore take a look at the place where the young populations and communities intersect as the vital link that will determine the future of religious life. Our analysis should not only concern Europe. The question should also be examined with reference to the rest of the world, as everywhere. Although the admission of a particular young man or woman to a congregation (or monastery) may be the work of the Spirit, it takes place via the mediation of a double attraction: that of certain young people to a certain congregation and that of the members of that congregation to a certain type of young people. To speak of “attraction” does not mean to suggest a sordid or ambiguous situation, but to admit a mutual interest, a recognition in another of a part of one’s own self.² This attraction is the work of the Spirit, but needs to be “purified” of the dross of unhealthy fascination and methods of seduction.

Every kind of congregation, of theology of religious life and of relationship between faith and the world attracts a certain type of young person and he in turn will have a bearing on the particular nature of the congregation and its theology, indeed its spirituality. It’s this game of two halves which creates a sense of belonging to a community (and not merely one of adherence) and which will allow each member to realise his collective and personal identity. It is this which will allow someone to call himself a religious of such and such a family and to play a part in the monastery or congregation. It is through this that the obstacles which block the way forward to the future are removed.

This approach helps to distance us from one framed merely in terms of offer and demand, the offer being the congregations that wish to welcome new novices and the demand being vaguely represented by a body of young people in search of religious life. The logic of the market place cannot make sense of what takes place during the process of integration into religious life nor of the issues thrown up by it, because there is a bond formed as a community and a particular type of young person are grafted together.

In order to analyse the stages of this grafting, we will need to assemble a typology which exaggerates its features, all the while helping to identify just what is going on. Apart from the congregation that has no longer been attracting any vocations for some time and never will again, (not because of

any deficiency, but because it has come to the natural end of its mission) six main types can be identified, although assuredly others will come to light in other discussions of this issue.

The first type of graft is that which is attempted by communities which are almost defunct, whether this be a reality or merely considered to be one by concerned parties (many congregations react in such a pessimistic fashion). Onto an almost desiccated trunk, a graft of young, fragile people, who are easily led, is hastily made, to prevent the tree from dying too quickly. These fragile young people are many in number; the offspring of contemporary society are not limited to dynamic go-getters, creators of a new internet culture and the innovators of technology and business. It has left standing on the sidelines large groups of young people tired of life and competition, who have endured a number of failures in relationships, in their mental health and professional lives, walking a winding and difficult path through life. These people are scarred with existential doubt, with handicaps, with fear of facing the future. They do not love themselves; they write themselves off and in fact try to shut themselves away in order to remake themselves, or even to construct for themselves an identity for the very first time. These young people are thirsty for some recognition that will enable them to say that life is not meaningless after all and do not want to have to display too much creative energy or initiative or have to fight for themselves. They will let themselves, at least for a while, be directed and are ready to enter a community that will offer an apparent safe haven where they will be looked after, declaring that they want to serve and obey, when they really want to hide themselves away. From this perspective, young immigrants from poor countries are potential targets.

The congregation that engages in this type of graft is not cruel or twisted; it is representative of many of congregations that attract and accept this type of youth. It is trying to survive and offering a space for the young and fragile. It does not demonstrate itself to be a place demanding careful discernment nor the development of new abilities. It values above all the spirituality of service, obedience, humility and openness. In doing so, it finds itself in dangerous waters thanks to a gathering together of new people who are not motivated to take themselves in hand, or to become active driving forces in their own lives, and thanks to an already existing community that cannot face its own problems when such people are numerous, needing a large amount of psychological (or sometimes psychiatric) support, and lacking motivation and trust.

All congregations have contact with this type of person, but it never goes well if the congregation is alive or if there are many young people of this kind. It should not be hoped that new life can truly be reborn from this type of graft, unless the Holy Spirit who makes all things new overturns human logic, which

is always a possibility. It is nonetheless a safe bet that such a graft will be a fruitless, sad and difficult experience for all concerned. However, therein lies a challenge for the whole Church: how to welcome fragile people in a world that only seems to want the best.

The second type of graft is the opposite of the first. It applies to communities which are fully alive, confident in their own identity, and, more often than not, led by strong, attractive leaders. As young members attract others to it, these congregations can be flourishing and are on an upward curve; their sometimes rapid growth will need management and their young people formation. The strength of these groups is in their conviction that they have been entrusted with a rescue mission to save Christianity, or to save certain values or certain behaviour in a decadent, meaningless and ephemeral world of globalisation or commercialism and of religious or ethical laxity. The young people who turn up in such congregations are people of conviction who affirm one another and as such do not easily tolerate those who waver, raise concerns or hesitate. They exhibit a highly developed level of missionary or monastic activity and their communities are stimulated accordingly and reconfirmed in their identity and their sense of responsibility in the face of modernity.

The institutes of religious life where this type of young person is present will also face the issue of combat, of fighting to remain radical, affirming its values at the risk of becoming a self-caricature, re-emphasising its separation from the world, its counter-culture, valuing a certain elitism. They must prove how creative they are, how worthy they are as contenders, in their levels of recruitment, because for them numbers are a proof of the relevance of the combat they are fighting. If young people exist in other congregations, that's bad casting which won't perform well; the typical obsession with numbers does not permit a real graft.

The third type of graft is that which takes place mostly in highly visible communities, mostly warm and open to the young people's own world. These communities may be new branches of old congregations, communities marked by charismatic renewal, or simply communities where the liturgy is rich and carefully prepared. Explicitly situating themselves in the world of the young, they polarise the interest of the youth and are attractive to them. Among those men and women who show interest, many define themselves as on a quest for spirituality, for a mystical experience. They are often disillusioned with a modernity they find too scientific and too concerned with profit; they are even more frequently deeply feeling and subjective people. They are searching for a new kind of life, an alternative way of living. They are just as representative of modernity as technologically savvy "geeks" working in the field of communications. They are concerned about inter-religious dialogue, about a spirituality that transcends denominational boundaries. Their spiritual quest is

sometimes quite removed from typical Catholicism, as they are often recent converts or recently returned to the practice of their faith. They are enthusiastic and see the congregation that attracts them as a place of experiences, friendship and “love”. These young people are often profoundly spiritual, but risk having great difficulties with living the monastic rule, the regular community routine, the domestic aspects and economic realities of the house, because their subjectivity encourages them to value a certain individualism. The culture difference between their world and that of classic Catholicism is a difficult obstacle to surmount and they will quickly find themselves disillusioned with the community, criticised for their excessive idealism. They risk being ephemeral passers through in the community which either begins to tire of such vagaries, of such insurmountable gulfs in thinking, or which itself risks drifting towards similarly hybrid tendencies and over-emotional reactions that cannot be helpful in the longer term.

Confronted with this type of young person, the challenge is clearly to integrate them into the religious, and not only spiritual, culture. It requires helping them to centre themselves on Christ, his Word, and traditional theology. In order for them to enter into normal community life, to discover the aims of the monastic rule, to take into account the challenges of daily life and the needs of other members of the community, it will be necessary to implement a teaching plan that does not suppose any prior knowledge and that wholly avoids subjectivity, which in a large, organised community is not always easy. This type of graft demands not only patience, but also a highly clear idea of what exactly is meant by a Catholic religious life and not only by a common life in a group of people burning with spiritual zeal.

The fourth type identifies those young men and women who are keen to restore what, so far as they are concerned, has been lost from contemporary congregations and monasteries. They enter communities in order to rebuild them, to put them back on track, introducing new rigour and efficacy. They are sure of themselves, are natural leaders and intellectuals, valued by contemporary society. They are “winners”, fully integrated with the modern world, and are used to fighting their corner in a competitive environment. Thanks to their strong personalities, they give hope to their elders, but also prove difficult to integrate in the middle lane, in the collective journey, which in the reality of religious congregations, is not only that of the most advanced members or of the youngest in years. They weary of the slower paced. These young people with a passion to reform and restore are found in monastic life just as much as in apostolic life. They have ideas, projects, strategies, all of which must be implemented according to their vision in order to ensure success.

The communities that welcome these youngsters run the risk of becoming adrift from their charism, leading to a particularly acute rupture wherever that

charism is not especially defined, or where unity around a particular project is weak. The older members of the congregation will suffer the most in this case; this may in fact be to the advantage of renewal, but this is not assured. The challenge will be to guide these revivalists into the historical context that goes before them, into a living and not a fossilised tradition; into believing in others, especially in the weakest members of the community; into being patient and into setting store by the collective dynamic. This will be difficult and there is a huge risk of these people throwing in the towel; the need to dominate (albeit for good) and to take charge is often too great.

The fifth type of graft concerns “generous youngsters”, who are frequently found among candidates for old-established religious families: technologically savvy efficiency gurus, clued up on blogs, the internet, the world of communication, and more concerned with packaging than theoretical content. These “workers for Jesus” want to place their modern communication, marketing, and occasionally management abilities at the service of the faith and of the congregation that welcomes their creativity. They are generous with their talents and prefer to work for the Church rather than in the rat race. They care about the number of hits that their community blog receives, the number of participants who come to the activities and events they organise. The “buzz” they create is the measure of success of evangelisation, of preaching. Communities that have slightly lost steam or that are looking to reposition themselves in contemporary society are fascinated by what these young people have to offer, these movers and shakers of the new evangelisation. They gain from them a growth in reputation, celebrity and modernity and as such find a place in modern society. This graft seems therefore to be successful and truly can be as long as the congregation is prepared to undertake this new adventure into the world of communications. A congregation that struggles to integrate this new culture risks falling apart, with the communicators on one side, and on the other, the elements of resistance, who are too old or who think that the spiritual, liturgical or theological aspects of religious life cannot be grasped by such a strategy.

The main challenge is not to give way to the culture of superficiality or theatricality. It involves helping these “givers” to go further, in silence and study, along their path to an intimate friendship with Christ, to deepen their beliefs within the living tradition of their congregation, to value that which is done in secret, unseen and unspoken. The graft is possible, and brings the promise of a dynamic future, but it requires the use of stiff “antidotes” to push against the current of these young people’s natural tendencies, without discouraging them and while valuing what they have to bring to evangelisation.

The sixth and final type, representing a somewhat smaller group than it did forty years ago, and now the least pronounced, includes those young people

that modernity has taught to be autonomous, within an accepted set of constraints and with a certain pragmatism that has little to do with ideologies. Although they belong to a minority in the modern world, they have no complex about it, as they see this world and the Church as containing challenges to take up with others. They find themselves in accord with congregations and monasteries concerned with the future of society, the planet and the well-being of mankind. They are keen to participate with others in bringing the faith and the Church up-to-date, whether it be in the field of acts of solidarity in the public square (though they are seldom aligned with party or union politics), regions of conflict, professional work or in developing countries, or indeed in the pastoral domain (the two areas complementing one another). They love prayer, having time for themselves, and study; they wish to be free in their work and their personal relationships; they like to be kept current and to take part in the decision making process. Moreover, they are gregarious and develop expansive friendship networks in which the congregation does not figure at all at the centre.

The congregations that attract this type of young person are those that accept the challenges of autonomy among its members, of recognising originality and those that encourage individual initiative. They need to offer real challenges for their young intake and provide real opportunities for engagement to enable each to give their all. If they do not take individual personality into account and fail to delegate responsibilities, they run the risk of watching these young people flag before their very eyes, close up on themselves and head for the door. The community also risks no long functioning as a collective homogeneity, becoming merely the living quarters of individual adventurers where religious obedience and fraternity are simply negotiable options. They need therefore to propose a strong collective, personal and structured rule, allowing for individuality, recreation times where different dynamics can meet and be explored, a school of fraternity³ providing horizons for each individual's journey.

Of course, individual young people will not all fit exactly in to one of these categories or types of graft completely, and many unlikely mixtures will prove themselves not only possible, but sources of life in abundance. Religious life is not the result of the logic of sociologists and it would be pointless to try, as some "psychological" tests do in magazines, to find out which category is found in each congregation. The Holy Spirit, who creates fresh new paths for each of us, is here among us, and comes always to confound our expectations, joyously giving rise to what seems incredible.

Modernity, in society as much as in the Church and religious life, is characterised by diversity, by the break-down of people and institutions. It all comes down, therefore, to the individual and not to the unified environment of the family or community responsible for them. The personal journey of each

person can either look to the security of others or otherwise forge its own unique course. The pathways are many and often chaotic or unlikely. From this perspective, religious life has a new mission, namely to give a dynamic of coherence to each centred on Christ and His Word, proposing a progressive unification of separate existences. But this cannot happen in a uniform way; religious life is pluralistic and individual personalities are unique mysteries.

This extreme diversity may seem to be a handicap to the legibility and visibility of religious life. And so it can, if the dialogue between people of different orientations lays over a tendency to ostracism a more fertile soil in which Christ can be proclaimed and celebrated. No-one is excluded a priori from religious life if it is indeed God and the fraternal love that comes from Him and returns to Him that is the starting point and the horizon of the journey of the one who wishes to live this one particular way of being a Christian.

Emphasising particular types of graft is not meant to be a way of denying the existence of a common ground to them all. In today's world, all forms of religious life have to re-centre themselves on the method by which they prepare their members to make themselves open to the encounter with God (contemplation, silence, interiority) and to translate this encounter into fruit for the world through brotherly intimacy with the most wounded people in life, in acts of solidarity with them, thus dispelling, if only for a second, their fear or pain.

It is this double dimension of the encounter with God and the "poor man" which religious life will forever enjoy, for all generations and sensibilities. There, then, we must hold fast in fraternity to proclaim in the face of worldly seductions that a doorway has been opened by the Cross and through it is to be found life in all its fullness.

¹ I have used this term in *Pour qu'ils aient la vie en abondance. La vie religieuse*, Cerf, 2010 ; translated into Italian as *Perché abbiamo la vita in abbondanza*, Edizioni qiqajon, 2011

² Jean Claude Lavigne, *Voici je viens*, ed. Bayard, 2012

³ Jean Claude Lavigne, "Pour qu'ils aient la vie en abondance", chapter 10

BE COMPASSIONATE AS YOUR FATHER IS COMPASSIONATE

José Antonio Pagola

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Original in Spanish

Jesus is not a scribe or a priest from the time of Jerusalem. He doesn't dedicate himself to teaching religious doctrine or explaining the Law of Moses. Jesus is a traveling prophet, a native of Galilee, who announces an event that begs to be heard and heeded to, for it can change the history of humanity. Thus Mark summarizes his activity. Jesus went through Galilee announcing the Good News of God saying: "*The kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe in the Good News.*"¹ What Jesus called the "*kingdom of God*" is the heart of his message and the passion that animated his whole life.

The surprise is that Jesus never explains what the kingdom of God is. What he does is suggest with his life and his parables how God acts and how the world would be if his sons and daughters acted like the Father in heaven. We can say that Jesus only sought one thing: that there would be men and women on earth that would start to act as God acts. This was his obsession: What would life be like if people appeared more like God? This requires us to ask ourselves a few questions: How does God act? How did his Son Jesus act? What was important to him? What does it mean to act like the Father of heaven by following in Jesus' footsteps?

1. God is Compassionate

Jesus never speaks of a God who is indifferent or far away, forgetting the suffering of his sons and daughters, or interested only in his own honor, glory,

or rights. At the center of his religious experience, we don't find a "legislator" God who tries to govern the world through laws or with a "righteous" God who intervenes angrily to punish the sins of his sons and daughters.

For Jesus, God is compassion. He is motherly (*rahamim*) inside. Compassion is God's way of being, his first reaction to his creatures, his way of looking at the world and of treating people. God acts, moved by compassion. God feels toward his creatures what a mother feels toward the child that she carries in her womb. The most beautiful parables that left Jesus' lips and, doubtless, those that came most deeply from his heart, were those that he told so that everyone might understand the surprising compassion of God toward his sons and daughters. We will only look at two.

The most captivating, perhaps, is that of the prodigal son.² God is seen here as the father who does not guard his inheritance for himself; he does not live obsessing about the morality of his sons; he always awaits the lost. "*Still far off*" he sees his son arrive who had abandoned him and he "*is deeply moved*": he takes off running, he embraces him and kisses him effusively like a mother; he interrupts his confession to save him humiliation and restores him as his son. For Jesus, this is the great metaphor for God: a father, deeply moved, who welcomes his lost children and begs that his brothers welcome them with the same care and understanding. Is this the kingdom of God?

Jesus preaches another surprising and provocative parable.³ God appears as the good proprietor of a vineyard who contracted workers to work it at different hours of the day. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, he did not pay them according to the work they had done. To each of them, he gave one denarius, or in other words, what a family in Galilee needed to live for a day. Hearing the protests of those who felt harmed, the proprietor of the vineyard responds with these surprising words: "*Do you have to see with bad eyes that I am good?*" According to Jesus, God does not judge people's lives according to our criteria. The Father in heaven is good and compassionate. Could it be true that with his profound mercy God, more than looking at our merits, is always looking at how to respond to our needs?

2. Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate

Moved by his experience of the compassion of God, Jesus introduces into history a new principle for action. The strength that must impregnate the way of the world is compassion.

The religious and political ordination of the Jewish people came from a basic requirement accepted by everyone. The old book of Leviticus put it like this: "*Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.*"⁴ The people must imitate the holiness of the God of the temple: a God that chooses his people

and rejects the pagans, that blesses the just and damns the sinners, that welcomes the pure and shuts out the impure. Holiness is the quality of God's being, the first thing that must orient the conduct of the chosen people. The ideal is to be holy like God.

Nevertheless, this imitation of the holiness of God, understood as the separation of the "non-holy," the impure, the contaminated, has generated throughout centuries a discriminating and exclusive society. The Jewish people seek their own holy and pure identity excluding the pagan and impure nations. But also within the chosen people, the priests enjoy a rank of purity that is superior above the rest of the people, for they are at the service of the people among whom lived the Holy One of Israel. The men belong to a level of ritual purity superior above the women who are always suspect of impurity due to their menstruation and giving birth. Those of good health are closer to God than the lepers, the blind, or the crippled who are excluded from access to the temple. This search for holiness creates barriers and discriminations. It did not promote mutual welcome, fraternity, and communion.

Jesus understood it quickly. This imitation of a holy God does not respond to his experience of a welcoming and compassionate God. So, with surprising audacity and clarity, he introduces a new principle that transforms everything: "*Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.*"⁵ It is the compassion of God and not his holiness that is the principle that must inspire the conduct of his sons and daughters. God is great and holy, not because he rejects and excludes the pagans, sinners and the impure, but because he loves all without excluding anyone from his compassion.

This is why, for Jesus, compassion is not just one more virtue but rather the unique way for us to become like God. The only way to see the world as God sees it, the only way to welcome people as he does, to approach those who suffer as the Father approaches them. This is the great inheritance of Jesus to all of humanity.

3. Jesus, Prophet of compassion

Jesus was the first to live completely from this compassion of God, clearly challenging the system of holiness and purity that predominated the society of his time. The prophetic activity of Jesus is characterized by three unmistakable features. Jesus is a *healing prophet* dedicated to alleviating the suffering of the sick; a prophet that is *defender of the poor*, excluded by the empire of Rome and forgotten by the religion of the temple; a prophet that is a *friend of sinners* who welcomes the undesirable people that live at the margin of the Covenant. These three features must characterize he who radically follows in his footsteps.

- * Jesus approaches, before anyone else, the sick of the villages.⁶ They are those who most suffer. His task is always the same: he alleviates their pain, he caresses the skin of the lepers, he frees those possessed by impure spirits, he rescues them from the margins where they are living and returns them to the community. Jesus suffers to see the distance that exists between the suffering of these sick and malnourished men and women and the healthy life God wants for all of them. He doesn't cure them to prove his divine condition or the truth of his message. What moves him is compassion.
- * This compassion moves him also to defend those who live wounded by misery. The poor that surround Jesus are a group easily recognized. They don't know what it is to eat meat or wheat bread. There are laborers without a stable job and peasants fleeing from their creditors. Many are women. Among them, widows have not been able to remarry, sterile wives repudiated by their husbands. All these men and women have one feature in common: they live in a state of misery from which they can no longer escape. Jesus unites himself to them as one more beggar. He welcomes them and defends them: *"Blessed are you who have nothing because yours is the kingdom of God; blessed are the hungry for you will be satisfied; blessed you who mourn for you will laugh."*⁷ That misery which condemns them to hunger, sickness and a cry does not have its origin in God. The suffering of these poor innocents must be taken seriously. It cannot be accepted as something normal, for it is unacceptable for God. Everyone must know that they are the favorite sons and daughters of God. Nowhere will life ever become exactly how God wants it if it is not by liberating the poor from their misery.
- * But what is more surprising about Jesus is not to watch him cure the sick on the Sabbath or defend the least of that society. What is more scandalizing is to see how he welcomes sinners in friendship and how he sits at the table with the tax collectors and prostitutes: *"What? Does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" "There you have a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of sinners."*⁸ How can a man of God act like this? Jesus didn't seem to listen to the critics and insisted in welcoming all. He doesn't exclude anyone. He knows well the heart of the Father. Everyone can count on his friendship. Even sinners that live far from God. Those friends that he welcomes at his table are "lost" sons and daughters that are not likely to return to God by way of the Law. But God seeks them as a shepherd seeks his lost sheep.⁹ That is why Jesus offers them friendship and forgiveness before God before they are converted. He does it trusting completely in the compassion of God. They do not deserve forgiveness. No one deserves it. But that is God's way: mercy, love, and gratuitous forgiveness. No one on this earth has shown a fuller sign of compassion and forgiveness in the

name of God.

4. *The parable of the good Samaritan*

This parable is the one which best suggests the revolution introduced by Jesus from his experience of the compassion of God. According to the story ¹⁰, an assaulted man lies abandoned in a ditch on the side of a lonely road. Fortunately, two travelers appear on the road: first a priest, then a Levite. They represent the holy God of the temple. Surely, they will have compassion on him. They do not. Both of them “*make a detour*” and walk on by. On the horizon a third traveler appears. He is not a priest or a Levite. He doesn’t even seem to be one of the chosen people. Nevertheless, when he arrives, “*he sees*” the wounded man, “*he is moved,*” and “*he comes near.*” Afterward, moved by compassion he does all that he can for the man: he cures his wounds, he bandages them, he puts him onto his own horse, he takes him to an inn, he takes care of him and he pays for everything. The action of this Samaritan reveals to us the dynamic of true compassion.

* *The compassionate gaze.* The Samaritan knows how to see the wounded man with compassion. This is first. Compassion does not come out of attention to the law or reflection about human rights. It is awakened in us from an attentive and responsible gaze on he who suffers. The gospels have conserved the memory of the compassionate gaze of Jesus. Upon entering Nain, he finds a widow that is taking her only son to be buried; according to Luke, “the Lord, seeing her, was moved and said to her: Do not weep.” ¹¹ This is how Jesus is. He cannot see anyone weeping without intervening. But the gospels remind us, above all, of the compassionate gaze of Jesus toward his people: “*When he took off, he saw many people, he felt compassion for them and cured the sick.*” ¹²

The disciple of Jesus does not close his eyes in front of the suffering of his people. He learns to see the face of those who suffer as Jesus does: with compassionate eyes. This gaze liberates us from egoism that block our compassion and the indifference that permits us to live with a calm conscience. It has been properly said that the Christian mystic is not a “mystic with closed eyes,” concerned exclusively with attention to the inside. He is a “mystic with eyes open” (J. B. Metz) to the suffering that surrounds us.

* *Who needs me?* The scribe had asked Jesus: Who is my neighbor? At the end of the parable, Jesus asks the scribe: Which of the three travelers has made the wounded his neighbor? The question we have to ask ourselves is: Who is my neighbor? How far do my obligations go? He who looks at people with compassion asks himself: Who needs me to come near and make him my neighbor? When the disciple of Jesus lives out the compassion

of God he approaches all of humanity that suffers, whatever his race may be, his town, or his ideology. He does not ask himself *who should I love?* but *who needs me close?* This question is oriented toward action that finds a way before suffering.

- * *The commitment of gestures.* The Samaritan from the parable does not feel obligated to fulfill a determined moral code. He simply responds to the situation of this wounded man inventing all kinds of gestures oriented toward alleviating his suffering and restoring his life. Our response to those who suffer is always insufficient and inadequate, but the important thing is to break the indifference and live sowing gestures of goodness, and promoting responses to suffering.

This is the way of Jesus, the prophet of compassion, who “*went everywhere doing good.*”¹³ He doesn’t have political or religious power. He cannot resolve the injustices that are committed at Galilee, but he lives sowing gestures of goodness oriented toward changing society. He embraces children in the street because he doesn’t want these fragile ones from Galilee to live as orphans; he blesses the sick so that they would not feel rejected by God for not being able to receive the blessing of the priests of the temple; he touches the skin of the lepers so that no one would exclude them from living in society; he cures breaking the Sabbath so that all would know that not even the most sacred law is more important than those who suffer; he welcomes the undesirables and eats with sinners devalued by all because, in the moment of practicing compassion, the evil and the indignant have just as much of a right as the good and pious to be welcomed with mercy.

These gestures are not conventional. They are born in Jesus by his will to make a more loving world of solidarity in which people help each other and mutually take care of each other. It doesn’t matter that frequently they are small gestures. The Father knows even down to the glass of water that we give to he who thirsts. They are gestures oriented toward affirming the life and dignity of human beings. They are reminders that it is always possible to intervene to bring good out of the evil that exists in the world.

5. Go and do the same

Jesus concludes the parable of the good Samaritan with this question: “*Who of these three seems to you to be the neighbor of he who fell at the hands of the wicked?*” The scribe responds: “*He who had compassion on him.*” Jesus answers: “*Go and do the same.*” Now we know what we have to do: not “take a detour” before anyone who is suffering, open our eyes, look attentively at all the men and women who are assaulted, robbed, abused, abandoned in the many paths of life. Go near to the ditch, lift up the wounds, live curing those

who suffer.

We have to understand Jesus well. Compassion must not be reduced to a feeling of our hearts. It does not consist of once in a while performing an “act of mercy.” To evade misunderstandings and false reductions we must understand compassion as a principle that is at the origin of all our action, that imprints a direction on all of our being, and that forms our style of living at the service of those who suffer.¹⁴

To understand well the compassion of Jesus we must differentiate three elements. In the first moment, so to speak, Jesus interiorizes the alien suffering, he lets it penetrate him: he makes it his, he lets it hurt him. In the second moment, this interiorized suffering provokes a reaction, it is converted into a point of departure of an active and responsible behavior; it becomes a principle of action, a style of life. Finally, this style of life is made concrete in commitments and gestures, oriented toward eradicating suffering, or at least, alleviating it.

This style of life is first of all one of following Jesus. Nothing is more important. We will have to do many things in life, but compassion must be the undertone of it all. Nothing can justify our indifference before alien suffering. Compassion must form our style of life: our manner of understanding events and seeing all people; our manner of relating and living with others; our form of radically following Jesus.

¹ Mark 1:15

² Luke 15:11-32

³ Matthew 20:1-15

⁴ Levítico 19,2

⁵ Luke 6:36

⁶ The gospels repeatedly show that Jesus cured “moved by compassion.” Literally, it says that Jesus “trembled inside” to see the sick suffer.

⁷ Luke 6:20-21

⁸ Mark 1:16, Matthew 11:19, Lucas 7:34

⁹ Luke 15:4-7

¹⁰ Luke 10:30-36

¹¹ Luke 7:13

¹² Matthew 14:14. See also Matthew 9:36

¹³ Acts 10:38)

¹⁴ See J. Sobrino, *El principio-misericordia. Bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*, Sal Terrae. Santander, 1992, 31-45)

TESTIMONIES OF LIFE

TALITHA KUM. FROM THE WOMENS' PERSPECTIVE

Interview with Sr. Estrella Castalone, FMA

A Salesian Sister since 1978, Sister Estrella was born in Canlubang (Philippines) in 1949. As a Theology graduate of the Pontifical Salesian University, she worked for many years with the young people of her country. In 2003, she became Executive Secretary of the AMRSP (Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines). It was the beginning of a mission which along the way has found her working alongside other women in the defence of women and minors caught up in human trafficking. Since 2010 she has been Co-ordinator of the International Network of Consecrated Life against human trafficking.

Original in Italian

What is Talitha Kum?

Talitha Kum is the International Network of Consecrated Life against the trafficking of persons, instituted by the UISG (International Union of Superiors General) in 2009. Its origins can be traced to a project which was begun a year or so earlier together with the IOM (International Organisation on Migration), and which was financed by the Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration of the United States' Embassy to the Holy See. Its objective is to share and to concentrate the resources available to religious for the prevention and the denouncement of human trafficking, the raising awareness thereof, and for the protection and assistance of its victims.

What interest do religious have in human trafficking?

We have felt challenged by this modern form of slavery. As religious it is our urgent duty to speak up about the facts and to promote the dignity of every person who is created in the image of God. The greatest resource available to the religious life are the religious themselves, since they are engaged with every form of poverty and marginalisation; they come into direct contact with the humiliation and suffering, and the inhumane and degrading treatment to which women, men and children are subjected. The

criminal organisations which exploit people in such a way are highly organised, both individually and collectively. For this reason it was necessary to unite our forces and to build up an equally organised network which could put into contact those who work in the countries of origin of human trafficking with those who work in the transit and destination countries. Only in this way is it possible to prevent and to denounce the transformation of the human person into a commodity.

What Networks is Talitha Kum comprised of?

Currently there are 21 connected Networks which between them cover all the continents. These are formed by religious operating in Ireland-, Australia, Portugal, Canada, Nigeria, Dominican Republic, Albania, Indonesia, Brazil, Holland, Romania, South Africa, Italy, Thai-land, India, the Philippines, Germany, Kenya, Senegal and Peru.

In what areas does Talitha Kum implement its work?

They are very varied, since the phenomenon of human trafficking itself touches on reality at so many different levels, but they involve: *establishing* contacts and *working* in connection with other organisations – social, civil, religious and political – who are concerned with human trafficking; *optimising* and *sharing* resources to *reinforce* prevention, awareness and the denunciation of human trafficking and to protect its victims; *working* at an educational and formative level in order to reawaken public awareness around this issue; *sustaining* and *intensifying* those initiatives in the areas of formation, denunciation and assistance.

How is all of this implemented?

It is fundamentally implemented by means of the formation of religious, which is ordered towards enabling them to intervene effectively with regards to the causes and the effects of trafficking. 6 international courses of formation have already been held, in which more than 600 sisters participated. It is important to ensure good communication between members and the sharing of research, good practice, experience and resources – both human and material – in opposing trafficking. Also of importance is to provide key information for the public regarding the various activities and initiatives. Again, a stand must be taken and declarations made publicly in conjunction with international events which involve the movement of people. In this respect, we launched a significant campaign against trafficking on the occasion of the World Cup held in South Africa. Finally, it is implemented by the sustenance of local initiatives started by religious in order to raise awareness of this phenomenon, to work towards its prevention and to expose trafficking.

Who is the Talitha Kum team composed of?

The formation team is composed of religious and of one lay person – Stefano Volpicelli – who is a representative of OIM. We work in strict partnership with lay experts from the sector, who contribute research, methodology and strategy for legal action. The Network’s principle challenge, given its limited resources, is coordinating and sustaining its members’ programs both in terms of finances and personnel. For this reason, anyone wishing to come and help will be more than welcome! However, a dream that is yet to be realised is the active and practical collaboration between religious and priests.

What are the figures involved with regard to human trafficking?

In 2010, the United Nation’s *Report on International Human Trafficking* estimated that between 800,000 and 2 million people fall victim to trafficking every year: 66% of these are women, 12% are men and 22% are children/minors. In terms of exploitation, sexual exploitation is the most common form (79%), followed by forced labour (18%), begging and the trafficking of human organs.

The trafficking of minors is a whole issue in itself..

The trafficking of children is in fact the third biggest criminal activity globally. The most common forms are those kidnappings destined for illegal international adoption, forced marriages, military or mercenary engagement, domestic labour and occult practices. Last October, around 400 children were brought to Europe from Uganda for purposes of witchcraft! It is necessary to provide protection for minors in the wake of natural disasters or when one of the parents – especially the mother – or both parents emigrate in search of work. The fact of being left alone at home renders minors more vulnerable, more in need of affection and attention, and more susceptible to trusting anyone who offers them what they lack, even if they are unknown to them.

How come there are still those who are not aware of human trafficking and fall victim to it?

It seems like nonsense, but it’s true. One thing which must be considered is the difficulty in helping – in the proper sense – the victims, given that it is hard for them to cooperate in the denouncement of that which has happened to them. They will feel guilty to some extent. Another consideration is the digital revolution. Everything has been made easier by the internet: commerce, communication, education, cultural exchanges, advertising, travel and unfortunately, also the trafficking of persons. If, a few years ago, traffickers were physically visible, today thousands of people can be ‘exchanged’

behind the anonymity which the 'net affords.

What aspects should be borne in mind in order to combat trafficking by prevention, through education?

Our dream is to eradicate this modern form of slavery. However, the global situation demonstrates that neither is there a significant reduction in the “product” (the number of persons being trafficked) nor in the “demand” (those who exploit them): the vulnerability of men, women and children is increasing all the more. Only more efficacious intervention along preventative lines can limit these risks. However, the greater part of the involvement of religious within this particular apostolate is geared towards the protection, assistance and rehabilitation of the victims. It feels as though we are always dealing with the outcome, as if our work consists of ‘cleaning up’ the mess caused by the traffickers with respect to human dignity. It is a matter of not only proposing an end to trafficking, but of providing the opportunities to improve living conditions, both in villages as well as cities, so that parents and families can ‘protect’ their children. Finally, in the programmes run by our educational centres and in the schools, it is urgent to include topics which engage with this phenomenon to clearly inform as to what lies behind this modern plague.



LIFE IN UISG

- * On the 23rd of last April, the Executive Council of the UISG and of the USG met together with representatives of the **Northern American religious** (LCWR and CMSM) on the occasion of their visit to Rome. They had a fraternal discussion on matters including the “doctrinal evaluation” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, which had been received by the LCWR a few days before. During the month of August, the Conference of Religious held its annual Assembly in St. Louis, during which it elected a new President: Sr Carol Zinn, SSJ. The closing speech at this Assembly, given by the outgoing President - Sr Pat Farrell - has been published in this same bulletin. In order to share in the rich fruits of the Assembly of the LCWR, the UISG hosted a round table discussion on the 5th November, in which the President of the UISG - Sr Mary Lou Wirtz - and other sister-members of the LCWR took part
- * The Commission that was set up to co-ordinate the **Project “Regina Mundi in Diaspora”** (which offers grants for theological studies on behalf of the UISG) worked intensely between June and September to respond to the many applications it had received. A total of 32 study grants have been distributed for 2012. The application forms for study grants for 2013 will be sent out together with the next bulletin.
- * Between the 12th and 16th of last July, Sr Anne Gill, ODN represented the UISG at an **international and interdenominational meeting of religious (EIIR)** held in Pomeyrol (France). The sixty participants discussed the following, truly ecumenical, theme: *“Listen! God is speaking to us ... the Word of God for the life of the world”*. The liturgy, celebrated according to the traditions of the different faiths, and the dialogue, conducted in an atmosphere of openness and friendship, made possible a genuinely ecumenical experience.
- * During the last few months, numerous **General Chapters** have been held. These collegially-structured bodies serve to renew religious life and, as a consequence, the whole Church. Our offices are now receiving the registrations of the sisters who were elected to carry out the service of animating the Congregation. We wish to assure them all of our prayers to the Holy Spirit, that he may bless them with his gifts. On the 15th of last November, the Executive Council of the UISG invited the new female Superiors General who reside in Rome, together with their own Councillors, to our headquarters, in order to acquaint them with the Union and the various facilities for meetings that are on offer here in Rome. This

meeting also provided the opportunity to initiate an exchange and to strengthen relations between those engaged in the same mission. Another meeting will be held for the new female Superiors General who are not resident in Rome in the morning of the 3rd May 2013, before the opening of the Plenary Assembly.

- * Between the 4th and the 6th October 2012, the Committee of Italian Female Theologians held a Congress on the theme of **“Female Theologians on a re-reading of the Second Vatican Council.”** The Congress, supported by the UISG, who also promoted it amongst its own members, saw the participation of 70 female religious amongst a total of 200 participants, and it remembered the 23 women who participated in the Council, amongst whom were 11 religious.
- * Female Superiors General of different nationalities, members of the UISG, have been invited to the **Synod on the New Evangelisation** together with other woman, both lay and religious. During the preceding days, they have met to share common impressions on the *Instrumentum Laboris* and to decide which points require the further attention of the Synod, especially those that refer to lay and consecrated women within the Church.
- * During the month of November, the **Council of the 18** met; this is formed of 9 female Superiors General and 9 Superiors General of missionary Congregations and of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of People (*Propaganda Fide*). The Council of the 18 continued the reflection it had previously begun on *Religious life in Africa*. This time the sharing was around *The vow of chastity; light, shadow and challenge*. Fr Richard Baaworb, Superior General of the Missionaries of Africa and Sr Nzenzili Mboma, FMM, director of Sedos, spoke on behalf of the male and female religious respectively.