

YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE: TESTIMONIES AND PROPHETS

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INTRODUCTION

The presence of Christ often manifests itself in a mysterious and delicate way in our life and in our personal and collective histories. It is with this same discretion that the Consecrated Life continues to raise its prophetic voice, sensitive to the Word and to silence, to gestures and actions that the signs of the times reveal to us for the future of mission, while the new times and spaces of encounter with the Lord invite us to a journey of continual dying to self in order to live in Christ.

The cross of Jesus is not an element of the past. Through the story of a family from El Salvador, **Sr. Martha Zechmeister** reminds us that the Crucifixion is always present; we do not need to feel guilty nor victims of socio-economic injustice and human suffering, but to live our faith by welcoming the Cross as the only way of salvation, beginning the slow process of conversion that will bring us closer to humanity understood as our neighbour.

“The more we know it, the more we love it.”: These words of Leonardo da Vinci may well synthesize the message of **Fr. David Glenday**; the love of the Word can only arise if read and if we meditate on it assiduously. We could even say “enjoy” the Word, to the point of leaving it alone and not saying anything, staying in the most inner silence, listening to the mission that emerges from the Word, new every day. This is obviously a route that goes through the intellectual formation and the experience of a personal encounter. It is only then that we permit the Word to reveal itself in an authentic and surprising manner, and we will be able to read its message between the lines.

From the Apostolic Letter of his Holiness Pope Francis to the Consecrated on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, **Sr. Patricia Murray** highlights the two attitudes proper to religious: First, gratitude to God who fills us with His Grace, and then, the generosity without measure of those who allow themselves to be molded by God, as we see in the person of Pope Francis, a man inhabited by God’s grace, in the service of suffering humanity.

Religious life is not an abstract concept. It is the life of men and women, who continue to give their life for the Gospel, committed to the causes of the weakest. An example is Sr. Dorothy Stang whose tenth anniversary of death we are celebrating, murdered because she was defending the Amazon, in Brazil. Through the words written by **Sr. Zenilda Luzia Petry**, we pay tribute to all religious who, knowing their life to be in danger, remain firm in their faith and mission, faithful to their first Love who guides their steps.

Similarly, **Sr. Danielle Harrouk** expresses her gratitude for the signs of good, of peace, of gratuitousness and fraternity offered by many men and

women who give their life for their brothers and sisters in countries at war and plagued by persecution, where one perceives, more than anywhere else, the proximity of death, and where poverty is common. Religious congregations, then, become oases of hope and life in the midst of destruction and violence...

In this fifth centenary of the birth of Saint Theresa of Jesus, her presence could not fail: It comes to us through the article by **Sr. Giselle Gomez**. This author introduces us to the interior way of the Saint searching for her own identity, which is none other than the experience of the encounter with God; a spiritual journey sometimes long and costly, other times short and joyful, which succeeds only in prayer at caressing the Truth and calming the soul: "Look at Him who looks at her."

THE MARTYRED PEOPLE TODAY AND THE HOPE THEY BRING US

Sr. Martha Zechmeister, CJ

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Introduction

Monseñor Romero, like Rutilio Grande, his predecessor, and Ignacio Ellacuría, his follower and reflective echo, had, in their historic moments, in the years before and after the Salvadoran civil war, the prophetic charism and the genius to give voice to the suffering of the people. The people, sacrificed at that time to the idol of wealth, cut down in their struggle for a life of dignity, exposed to cruel and barbaric violence, expelled from their homes and their land, living in a nightmare of torture, of overnight escapes and separation from their loved ones. This same people understood, in an instinctive and unambiguous way: Rutilio, Monseñor Romero, and Ellacuría are talking about us, about the reality that we suffer on a daily basis in our flesh. We are “the crucified people,” we are “the martyred people.” And not only are they talking about us, but they also dignify us and apply to us the ultimate kind of hope: You all are the body of Christ, crucified in history! You all are the martyred flesh—like the flesh of the poor guy from Nazareth, in which God makes God-self present in this world shaped by sin.

Rutilio Grande, Monseñor Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría interrupted with a new way of announcing the Gospel and denouncing sin. This new way of speaking, categorically rejected theological and pastoral *docetism*—verbage without flesh and empty of true reality. In this new language, “the living and effective Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12) is made incarnate. This Word creates reality; it is “liberating and saving, like

the language of Jesus himself.”¹

Rutilio Grande, Monseñor Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría had a brilliant gift of giving words to the reality, to the suffering of the people, but it is not only this that gives their language salvific and hope-giving power that speaks directly to the hearts of the most vulnerable and unprotected, but rather the firm and absolute coherence of their lives. This coherence coated the seal of their martyrdom, which was sealed with their blood.

Remembering the martyrs, and celebrating them, is dangerous. It obliges us, like them, to let ourselves be touched in our consciences, by the anguish and the martyrdoms that the victims suffer today; it obliges us to risk what seems like self-destructive insanity: to throw ourselves, with all of our existence, against this machinery that brutally crushes the vulnerable. To remember the body and blood of the martyrs, among them, the proto-martyr Jesus of Nazareth, does not allow for any kind of diet-celebration. It either initiates us into following them, or it is a lie, and carries with it “its own judgment” (cf. 1 Cor 11:29).

Making the legacy of the martyrs productive and doing theology in a way that is faithful to their inheritance, does not allow for any kind of sterile or mechanical repetition. One can be a specialist in the thought of Ellacuría, reading and analyzing every last word, and still betray him. Studying the thought of martyrs in depth is a task of the utmost importance that demands our entire intellectual rigor. But it can never be an end in itself, a merely academic task. To be faithful to their legacy, we are obliged to a patient exercise of contemplation, of paying close attention to the reality that the crucified people live today. If we do it well, it hurts. In good Salvadoran—and Austrian—slang, it hurts us to the marrow of our bones. Only from such pain can a new theological and pastoral word be born, a word that is effective and hope-giving, faithful to the inheritance of the martyrs.

We are tired of responding to the objection that the thought of the martyrs has lost validity and belongs to a past era because the “paradigm” has shifted. Yes, but we are conscious that their creativity prevents us from treating them as museum objects. Rather, to the contrary, it commits us even more to using all of our creativity. Yes, it’s true, we have to “update” the inheritance of the martyrs. However: What does it mean to “update”? As Ignacio Ellacuría says: *“To update something doesn’t mean, primarily, to bring it up to date in the same way that this expression might be fashionable these days. To update it means, rather, to give it present-day reality...”*²

I invite you all to the following exercise: to give present-day reality to the inheritance of the martyrs.

1. “You all are the Pierced Divine”

On June 19, 1977, in the hard-hit town of Aguilares, Monseñor Romero gave one of his most precious homilies. As Jon Sobrino has reminded us many times, in the preamble of this homily, Monseñor Romero redefines his episcopal office in a tragic and accurate way: “It is up to me to gather up run-over and dead bodies...”³ Following this, he addressed the suffering people of Aguilares:

“You all are the Image of the Pierced Divine that presents Christ nailed to the cross and pierced by the spear. This is the image of all peoples who, like Aguilares will be pierced, will be affronted.”⁴

With these words, Monseñor Romero identifies, in an audacious and courageous way, the cross of Jesus Christ with the horror that the people of Aguilares lived with at that time, exposed to violence, cruelty and humiliation. He affirms the “hypostatic union” between the crucified people and the crucified Christ, which are one single flesh and cannot be separated. And as a consequence, the crucified people are the presence of God and of God’s salvific work in this world; it is the sacrament of our salvation in history.

With this solemn declaration, Monseñor Romero directs his attention to the immense majority of human beings on our planet who tend to be made invisible, and because of this, are to be declared the truly “relevant.” It is true, also, that in the first world and in the condominiums of the wealthy in El Salvador there is suffering; children die of cancer or young people die in tragic accidents. There is no human existence without suffering. But there is disproportionate suffering, which is the characteristic of the crucified people. The people are martyrs, by the very fact of living an exaggerated and unjust kind of suffering. Their lives look like the Stations of the Cross, a permanent Calvary. To those human beings is directed the promise: “You are the Pierced Divine”.

I invite us now to do an exercise together, taking the risk as Monseñor Romero did, to affirm today, in front of the Stations of the Cross of the current-day Salvadoran people, “You all are the Pierced Divine.” I want to be concrete, to give flesh to this affirmation, by telling you the story of a single Salvadoran family. It is obvious that this makes us see only a small part of a much more complex reality. Nevertheless, unfortunately, the story of this family is not unique. Rather, it is exemplary of the nightmare that is lived every day by about a third of families in neighborhoods like Popotlan, Apopa, La Campanera, Las Margaritas, Soyapango, Lourdes, Panchimalco, downtown San Salvador, and in many other places.

We are ten days away from Palm Sunday. We will hear, as we do every year, the Passion, this year, according to Mark. He is the Evangelist who

writes soonest after the historical fact. Obviously, for the first communities, it was of primary importance to pay attention to every detail of this unraveling of tragic events of Jesus' final days. In the liturgy, the introductory title reads, "The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ" and invites us to accompany Jesus with an open and compassionate heart. If Monseñor Romero is right, and of this I am convinced, "You all are the Pierced Divine!" then it is important to take the history of this family with the same contemplative attention, accompanying them in all that has befallen them, as we accompany our Lord Jesus Christ in his journey to the Cross.

I will try to do this in the style of Mark: telling the facts in the most simple and sober way possible. Unlike Mark, I cannot give you the real names or places, in order to be discreet, and because of the danger this family would be in if the details are made public. However, I will put into words no more than the facts, although it will seem unbelievable that all this can accumulate in the life of one family. It is as implausible as the story of Job in the Bible: Upon them falls all possible misfortune.

2. A story of the passion of a Salvadoran family

Chapter One: The Disappearance and Violent Death of Paul

I have been a friend of the mother of this family for five years. In 2010, she worked as a cook in the student residence where I lived at the time. From here on, I would like to call her Mary, as a symbol of all women whose hearts have been pierced by a sword (Luke 2:35). I realized that Mary, who had always been so happy, was suddenly in a bad way— something serious must have happened. We still didn't know each other well enough to talk about anything serious. But it pained me to see those responsible for the student residence, to dismiss her without hesitating as soon as she declined physically and psychologically.

What actually happened, I learned months later when she sought me out to ask for work. In the moment of her crisis, the second of her three sons, seventeen years old, driver for a bakery had disappeared. I'd like to call him Paul. His boss had given him permission to travel with the bakery's vehicle to his house which caught the attention of the local gang members. They demanded sixty dollars of him and since he didn't have it, they gave him a final date. When the time was up, they took him and the young man never returned. His mother, his brothers and his cousins looked for him hopelessly. After three months of anguish, uncertainty and the premonition of horror, they found Paul's body, already decomposing near a cornfield. They identified him by his clothes.

In those days, Mary was on the edge of an abyss with psychosis, seeing

her son everywhere and talking with him. However, she rose again, to struggle for life—hers and that of her other two sons. Since then, she has worked with us, preparing food for our small community of ten people three times a week. (She is a creative cook, with spunk, always curious to try new recipes.)

Chapter Two: The Family is Expelled from Their Home

The first pain had just calmed, and Mary was able to get back to a routine, when the gang members began to disturb her again. They sent eight or nine year old kids with little slips of paper decorated with the worst words (old whore) to announce that they would begin collecting on the “open debt” or take the life of another family member. Only this time, the amount was raised to five-hundred dollars. At once, the family escaped to a far-away municipality. They were able to find a small house, in pretty bad condition, but they fixed it up. They were excited about planting the seed that the government gives out to be able to harvest a bit of corn and beans. In the moment when the first tender plants of hope sprouted and they felt safe, Mary was inspired to file a report against her son’s assassin, the head of the local gang where they had lived before. The police promised that she would be a protected witness. Nevertheless, in the attorney general’s office, there was a confrontation between her and the accused, separated only by a glass panel. She was never sure that it was really armored glass, and she suspected that she had been exposed to the view of the gang member. Since that day, she lived with chronic fear of the consequences.

Chapter Three: Mary is Raped and the Family’s Escape Continues

Her worst fears came true when the next hit happened. During Christmas of 2011, Mary, happy about receiving her end-of-the-year bonus, went to her house with her purchases for holiday dinner: chicken, vegetables, fruit. On the unpopulated way from the highway to her house, she was assaulted and raped by five men wearing hoods. She felt ashamed and didn’t tell her sons what had happened, but she insisted on leaving again as soon as possible. Her sons didn’t understand why, and with bad attitudes they left their house and went with her to the suburbs of San Salvador. From the beginning it was clear that they had entered a new cave of gangs, but those were the only kind of places within their economic reach with the little they had after having lost so much in the previous two times they had had to leave their home.

To me, Mary is the embodiment of the kind of primordial sanctity that Jon Sobrino talks about. What has happened up to now would be enough to finish a person off. In her infancy, Mary had already suffered violence and abuse. Now the trauma of multiple and brutal rapes caused serious gynecological problems and a profound depression characterized by apathy and temporary mental lapses. It is a pure miracle that Mary was able to take up her struggle

again to search for medical and psychological attention.

Chapter Four: Peter is Run Over

With an enormous amount of energy, Mary and her sons achieved a certain level of every-day normalcy again. Her oldest son, I'll call him Peter, had dropped out of school when his brother disappeared, just a few months before finishing high school. Since then, he had been working at a car mechanic's shop, without access to state health insurance or other labor rights. He had tried to claim them, and his boss had responded, "You know what door you entered through, and you can leave through the same one." Because of a lack of alternatives—without his high school degree, it was impossible to find work—Peter gave in. His work was to go out on his motorcycle to find parts in dumps all over the city. When, in March of 2013 we celebrated here at the UCA a mass for Monseñor Romero, in the middle of Mass, I got a call on my cell phone. I silenced it, but because of the caller's insistence, finally I left the chapel to take the call. I heard Mary's hopeless sobs: "My son is dying on me, my son is dying."

At a stoplight, Peter had been hit on his motorcycle by an ambulance. The tires of the vehicle had run over his stomach. It seems like a bad joke, but the medics, instead of helping him, ran away in order to escape the consequences of the accident. At last, half dead, he was taken to the Rosales Hospital. Peter underwent a dramatic, hours-long operation, and the struggle for his life continued for at least the next fifteen days. It is important to mention that in the Rosales Hospital, he was treated by an excellent doctor, professionally and humanely. But only someone who knows the conditions in this hospital might intuit what it would mean for a mother to accompany her son in this struggle, sleeping only a few hours a night on the floor under his bed.

Chapter Five: Chus' Serious Renal Insufficiency

Peter had hardly recovered and, with great difficulty, was able to get back to work when the youngest of the sons started presenting symptoms of poor health. I'll call him Jesus, nicknamed Chus, as is common in El Salvador. Chus was studying his first year of high school at the time at a private high school. Because of the family's instability, he had fallen behind a few grades and was too old to attend a public high school. Because of this, his mother and his brother made big sacrifices so that he could go to this private high school with a modest tuition which was for them enormous. In December of 2013, the doctors finally detected advanced renal insufficiency in Chus. He was on dialysis for a few months, until in March of 2014, an uncle on his deceased father's side donated one of his kidneys. The tragedy was that Chus got better after the transplant, but the uncle died because of an infection in the wound; he didn't wait long enough after the operation to resume bathing

in a polluted river near his house. Chus' psychological problems because of the guilt he felt, that he live at the cost of another, were great and they added up to a depression typical in patients who have transplants.

Mary's heroic struggle continued; she took her son to doctors and to psychological treatment, all with public, state help, and searching for support from many acquaintances for medicine and the special milk that Chus will need for the rest of his life.

Chapter Six: Gang Persecution Continues

Among all of these disasters, the trouble from the gangs got worse. They wanted to force Peter, the older son, to make trips for them on his motorcycle, his tool for work. The only way to get out of it would be to pay twenty-five dollars per month, more than a tenth of his salary. And in case that wasn't enough, the gang came to the family's house every Sunday to demand food for 15 people. When Mary didn't have anything besides rice and beans, they got angry and demanded "real food."

The only escape was to continue fleeing, this time to a rural village far from the capital. Here there was a brief respite, but no sustainable solution because in such a place there was no way to make a living; they had to travel four or five hours every day to get to work and they spent too much on transportation. After a few months, they gave up and returned again to the suburbs of San Salvador, to a different place, but no less dangerous than the previous, and the problems continued immediately. The gang members got Chus in the entrance to his school and beat him badly, with his scar still raw. They left no doubt that they would kill him if he dared to appear near school again. Mary, who had only attended two grades of primary school, went to the Ministry of Education to fight for her son to find a way to complete the few weeks that were left to finish high school. In her struggle, she could sometimes seem a bit exaggerated and aggressive. I don't see it this way; rather, I see in her "aggression" some of the "holy ire" of the prophets. It cannot be! This passion and fervor that life requires. At last, the principal of the school was moved by the laments of the "tedious widow" (Luke 8, 4) and hid Chus in his own house. He helped him study according to the Ministry's guidelines and prepare for final exams.

While Chus lived at the principal's house, the rest of the family continued to be exposed to the whims of the gang. Coincidentally, the little house in which they lived had a lower roof than the neighboring houses. When the police carried out searches at night, the gang members jumped onto the roof of the shorter house to hide in the family's backyard. Peter and Mary were petrified by the searches and had no other escape than another exodus, this time together with a good number of other hopeless families.

In a town on the outskirts of the city, they sought refuge close to their relatives, knowing that they were moving into the territory of the rival gang, but they didn't see any alternatives. At the beginning, everything seemed calm, until in December of 2014, when Chus graduated from high school. At that time, some relatives were in town for the first time in many years since they had left without documents for the United States. They organized a lunch among the family and hung balloons and a banner that said, "Congratulations on the day of your graduation." It drew the attention of the gang members, and again, they took Chus, beating him up and insisting that they didn't like him and that they would erase him from the map if he didn't either leave town immediately or let himself be recruited to the gang. They also assured him that if they didn't manage to kill him, he would have to pay with the life of his family members.

Chapter seven: Chus' Calvary

That same night an uncle took Chus in his pickup truck to the house of a friend in a neighborhood in San Salvador, close to the Chinese restaurant where Chus washed dishes at the time, even though he was very poorly paid. But the gang followed him and shot at him in the middle of the day. By some miracle, he was able to escape again, and very nervously ran away to where some distant relatives lived, far away in the countryside.

There he worked, helping out with the cattle. The woman of the home treated him very well, but the young people there, who were accustomed to that kind of work, made fun of him for being very skinny and having health problems. They found out he had had a kidney transplant and said to him, "Your life isn't worth anything; it's like an old rag." Again, I received a sudden call from Mary, saying, "My son is dying, my son is dying on me." This call was in January of 2015, late at night. That night, Chus had reached the limits of his strength and had tried to end his life. He swallowed a sulfur pill, together with other pills that were around the house. They found him having tremendous convulsions, foaming at the mouth. They took him to the closest hospital where they pumped his stomach and rescued him at the last second. He was left with a scalded stomach and deep depression.

Mary and Peter at that time began looking for a new way out, under incredible pressure. In the town where they still lived, the situation had become unbearable because of the gangs. The neighbors and their own relatives, who had lived in this town for generations, had already left. Mary and Peter found themselves suddenly among abandoned houses. They also considered that they couldn't leave Chus alone, out of fear that he would repeat his suicide attempt. They thought about going undocumented to the north, trying to get a humanitarian visa, or about going to the southern part

of Central America. For the moment, thank God, they can breathe a bit more easily; they found good people who protect them here in San Salvador, and can focus on Chus' medical treatment.

3. The Martyred People Carry and Denounce the Sin of the World

The story of the Passion of this Salvadoran family represents what many others suffer in a similar or worse way. Upon hearing it, the Stations of the Cross as we traditionally pray them are superimposed; how many falls under the weight of the cross there are and how much energy is needed to get up and continue along the path again. And the tragedy of "Simon of Cyrene" helping Chus with his cross and in doing this, losing his own life.

The mere existence of the crucified people, of the martyred people, is a prophetic denouncement; it raises its voice against "the sin of the world," it accuses the forces and powers that cause its daily crucifixion. Let us bear a few more moments contemplating this Passion and let us try to decipher the denouncement. The history of Mary's family could be our starting point for a socio-economic-political study of the evils which flagellate a considerable part of the Salvadoran people. Here I can only indicate some basic brushstrokes.

a. The Loss of Identity

The homilies of Monseñor Romero ended every Sunday with a denouncement of the violence that the people suffered: disappearances, torture, massacres. Meticulously investigated by his team, he gave dates, places, and the first and last names of the victims and victimizers. Bringing the atrocities from secrecy to the public view offered the victims protection, at least against the defamation of being called liars. Monseñor Romero made the faces of the victims visible and returned to them their dignity.

Today, it seems that the law that subjects all of El Salvador to iron-fist brutality is the slogan that can be read in the graffiti on so many neighborhood roads in dangerous zones: "See, hear, and shut up." Telling the story of my friends, I felt strong frustration because I have to hide their identities. I cannot, for example, show you the precious photo of the proud mother together with her son when he graduated from high school. Everyone who lives in a situation like theirs has already died multiple social deaths. They cannot trust their closest friends; they have to disappear all of a sudden, without saying goodbye to anyone. The famous social fabric, broken since the displacements of the war, instead of recuperating itself, decomposes more each day. For people like Mary, their roots are continually cut, as they run, permanently fleeing, hounded and followed.

b. The “Secondary Effects” of Poverty and Vulnerability

People like Mary, exposed to permanent stress, suffer as a consequence serious physical and psychological damage. A life of continuous anxiety and high tension provokes all kinds of psychosomatic illnesses. For a healthy, robust person, it is already difficult to find decent and stable work; for a person with multiple traumas, it is almost impossible. To close this vicious cycle, it is a constant struggle to secure access to adequate therapies and medications. They are forced to beg without dignity for something that belongs to them according to the Constitution: the right to healthcare.

c. Scandalous Impunity and an Unprotected People

Scandalous impunity weighs on El Salvador like a tremendous curse. Since “general amnesty” was declared for the victimizers of the civil war, the amount of unpunished capital crimes has multiplied progressively. Murderers seem to be untouchable. The vulnerable have no refuge, nobody to turn to, no court that offers effective protection. Apart from the infiltration of the police and the justice system, if they make the effort to put themselves on the side of the victims, they seem to be defenseless. Their searches and dramatic arrests often appear to be a big show for the media that covers their true impotence and represents an additional threat to the flagellated people.

Thanks to God, there are honorable police agents and officials in the justice system. There are institutions like the Institute for Human Rights at the University of Central America (IDHUCA), and many others of good will. But all of this seems like a drop in the ocean. In its majority, the martyred people are abandoned. As the psalmist says, “My escape has perished; no one cares for me... Listen to my cry for help, for I am brought very low. Rescue me from my pursuers, for they are too strong for me.” (Ps 142: 5,7)

d. Multiple Victimization

Young people like Chus, the protagonist of our story, are always under suspicion. The first reaction, if somebody finds out that a young person has to flee because their life is in danger is, “There’s got to be a reason. He/she must have gotten involved in something.” The victim is always charged with the accusation that the horrors that happen to him or her are a result of their own guilt. This diagnosis could be the mantra of all vulnerable people: “That won’t happen to me, because I’m not mixed up in anything.” This mantra is deceitful and satanic because it dissociates us from each other. It’s worse if this diagnosis comes from those who live comfortably and in safety. They justify their apathy and the hardness of their hearts with the shameless affirmation: “Whatever happens to them, they deserve it.”

It is intolerable to victimize the victims over and over again. Even the

gang members are, often times, victim and victimizer in the same person. They are human beings. That's why the vulgar demands to "fumigate the cockroaches" are also intolerable. Justice is needed, but not dehumanizing treatment that does not permit any kind of re-socialization and ends up turning them into the kind of beasts that the soulless part of society imagines them to be.

e. "The Sin of the World"

The Passion of the martyred Salvadoran people shouts what the sin inside this microcosm of this country is. Really, the situation is much more complex than what these few observations can indicate. Here, we cannot adequately deal with the naiveté of declaring in a mythological way that the gangs are "the source of all evil." In reality, the gangs serve as camouflage for much stronger forces, like organized crime, the drug and weapons mafia, etc. Furthermore, we will not understand the sin that the martyred people denounce if we do not contextualize it within the scandal of the global disorder.

The strong words of Ignacio Ellacuría, which he spoke in his speech in Barcelona ten days before his murder, prevail: "What on other occasions I have called the coprohistorical analysis, that is, the study of the feces of our civilization, seems to show that this civilization is gravely ill..."⁵ Reformulated from my own experience, I feel that the reality of El Salvador is like a 'concave mirror' in which the truth of our world as a whole is revealed and made denser. What the martyred people suffer at this moment in the highly dangerous areas of El Salvador allows us to see the repugnant face of global disaster and disorder, which, in an obscene way, privileges a few and martyrs at least one third of humanity. In October 2014, Oxfam, an NGO of international prestige, denounced that *the 85 wealthiest individuals in the world possess the same economic resources as the poorer half of the world population, 3.5 billion people*. According to OXFAM's prediction, in a short time, more will belong to the richest 1 percent than to the other 99%.⁶

Obviously, Ellacuría's affirmation that greed—the accumulation of capital—is the motor that moves history hasn't lost its validity. Certainly, there are zones of this Earth where poverty and its consequences are much more deadly than in El Salvador. But there are few zones in which the discrepancy between those who live in abundance and those who are exposed to permanent vulnerability is densified in such a scandalous way. There are some who have to work hard for two decades, in shifts that are bad for their health, often in inhuman conditions, and at the end they are not able to maintain their families, pay for a house, cover health costs, etc.; and others who spend the equivalent just to buy a vehicle, without taking into account maintenance costs. I have to confess that I have a bad habit of counting the

high-class cars in the parking lot at the UCA and of comparing the vehicles that state and church officials drive with the 42A or 27 route busses in which the people move, exposed to assault day after day.

Between these two extremes, between the authors and the victims of the economic disorder, we find the little guys who benefit from the neo-capitalist system—people like me, like the majority of the first world and like the middle class here in El Salvador. Let’s take the long view. We are small compared to the truly wealthy, but we live well, safely in secure areas, and we are often characterized by disinterest and shocking apathy when placed before the people carrying their cross.

In the third week of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola asks the participant to “make the effort to feel pain, to be sad and to cry.” He or she is to ask for “pain with the crucified Christ, tears... for the torture that Jesus suffered for me” (EE #195 and #203). The psychological objection tells us that this would be a fixation on the negative, that we are being seduced by a kind of sado-masochism. But we have to read this in the style of another great Ignatius, Ignacio Ellacuría. We can understand the Spiritual Exercises as a lesson in compassion, which unleashes a completely different dynamic: letting myself be moved in my gut by what the “sin of the world” inflicts, which our sin inflicts every day to the Pauls, Peters, Chus’, and Marys, and let me cry for my comfort, for my lack of courage and initiative to stop their unending Stations of the Cross. We have to update, to give current reality again, to Ignacio Ellacuría’s call to conversión, which we might consider as spiritual testimony:

“The only thing I would want... are two things: that you might place your eyes and your hearts on these people who suffer so much—some of misery and hunger, others of oppression and repression—and then (because I am a Jesuit), that before this crucified people you ask yourselves the question from the first week of the Exercises: What have I done to crucify them? What do I do to take them down from their cross? What should I do so that these people may be resurrected?”⁷

4. The Martyred People are the Sacrament of Salvation

To not go on too long, this last point can only signal the path to continue on. Ignacio Ellacuría begins his crucial essay on the crucified people⁸ with one big concern: How can it be that a big part of humanity continues to be “literally and historically crucified” if Jesus announced the Reign of God and if the Church has proclaimed our salvation for more than two thousand years? The Stations of the Cross continue on and on. What does salvation even mean, given the fact that “the majority of oppressed humanity” continues carrying the sin of the world?

Ignacio Ellacuría shakes us up to draw us out of our apathy and indifference in order to make us sensitive to the Calvary of the martyred people. He pulls us out of the “false spiritualization” of talking about salvation. This “sweetening and mystifying” perverts salvation into vague promises, empty of reality, like promises made during electoral campaigns. Ellacuría sets us on the way to discovering and acting out our salvation here and now, in history. Either our faith in salvation corresponds to a palpable reality, either it creates reality, or it truly is the opium of the people that puts us to sleep and makes us into insensitive monsters.

Out of this concern, Ellacuría asks himself, “Who are the Chosen People of God? Who is the true Church, the true subject of the salvific mission of Jesus in history?”⁹ The Second Vatican Council tells us that the Church is ‘sacrament,’ the ‘sign and instrument’ of salvation.” For Ellacuría, this affirmation is too vague. It must be made more precise; and this precision is the radical inversion of the perspective. It turns all of our ideas on their heads. The question is not, how do we talk about salvation when the majority of humanity is beat up and oppressed? But rather, it is the inverse. We have to kneel down before this mystery: The ‘martyred people’ is the historical subject of our salvation; the martyred people are the ‘sacrament,’ which means the real and concrete presence of God in this world; it is the martyred people who are the historical subject which makes real a salvific work for all humanity.

In the words of Jon Sobrino: Salvation comes from below! This means, firstly, that salvation does not come from above, not from the upper echelons of political parties, not from NGOs, not from international development programs. This inversion of perspectives, in total harmony with the Gospels, is scandalous:

“It is scandalous to propose that the needy and the oppressed are the historic salvation of the world. It is scandalous to many believers, who no longer believe that there is anything remarkable to be seen in the sign that the death of Jesus brought life to the world, but who cannot accept, theoretically, much less practically, that that death that gives life is happening in a real way today for the oppressed of humanity.”¹⁰

In the Stations of the Cross of my Austrian infancy, we prayed, “In the Cross is salvation, in the Cross is life, in the Cross is hope.” As a young person, this prayer provoked in me a crisis, understanding that the cross brings before us poor Jesus of Nazareth, cruelly tortured until death. How can we say that salvation, life, and hope are present there? It is the same scandal, the same insanity, to kneel before the cross of Jesus that brings us salvation, as it is to kneel before the crucified people that bring us salvation. But this

is our faith in Jesus Christ, incarnate, made of tortured human flesh.

“There is no salvation outside of the poor,” says Jon Sobrino. Making this affirmation concrete and giving it historic body: There is no salvation outside of the Marys and Peters and Pauls and Chus’ of El Salvador and of all the world. The creative and redeeming love of God is present in their daily and heroic struggle for life. With them, God passes through this world. They are the ones who carry our sins. By their wounds we are saved (Is 53). They are the ones who can take our hearts of stone to give us hearts of flesh (Ez 36:26), in them is present a vital energy capable of converting us and humanizing us.

The Gospel is the fierce call to the “world above”—and it is a great promise to those who suffer below. It says to them, this “world” considers you all to be disposable, the extras who don’t count, as those whose lives are not worth anything. The “world of sin,” in the sense of John the Evangelist, configured by the powers that be, the economically, militarily, and politically powerful, who either do not do anything to protect your lives, or worse, actively take your lives from you. But the truth is that there is no solution for this world unless the mystery of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is recognized in you, and in the torture that they make you suffer. There is no salvation for this world if the world does not bow down before the divine mystery, present in you.

¹ D. Bonhoeffer, “Reflexiones para el bautizo de D. W. R. Bethge”, *Resistencia y sumisión. Cartas y apuntes desde el cautiverio* (Salamanca, 2008, p. 161).

² I. Ellacuría, *Utopía y Profetismo*, *Mysterium Liberationes I*, p. 398.

³ Homilía en Aguilares del 19 de Junio de 1977.

⁴ Idem. p. 150.

⁵ I. Ellacuría, “El desafío de las mayorías pobres”, *ECA* (1989) 493-494.

⁶ <https://www.oxfam.org/es/informes/iguales-acabemos-con-la-desigualdad-extrema>.

⁷ I. Ellacuría, “Las Iglesias latino-americanas interpelan a la Iglesia de España”, *Sal Terrae*3 (1982), p. 230.

⁸ I. Ellacuría, “El pueblo crucificado”, *Mysterium Liberationes II*, o. c., p. 189ss.

⁹ Pueblo Crucificado, p. 189.

¹⁰ Pueblo Crucificado, p. 192.

GOD SPEAKS AND MISSION IS BORN

Fr. David Glenday, MCCJ

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***"Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart."
(Jeremiah 15, 16)***

As the years have passed and I have trod the paths of mission, it has become clearer and clearer to me how deeply and inextricably my life has been shaped and moulded by the call to be a missionary, and how this call has been, and remains, my reason to exist. Here I would like simply to focus on some areas where I have particularly experienced the joy and the delight of God's forming and transforming Word.

In the beginning was the Word. (Jn 1, 1)

I cannot remember a time when I did not experience God as speaking his Word to me: God has always been there, real and alive, interested and involved in me and the world, and always available and willing to enter into conversation.

My Mum, a well-travelled Irish Catholic, loved the Mass, and I found that I loved it too, and so from an early age I was involved in the Eucharist close-up as an altar-server: it was all in Latin at the start, of course, but there was no doubt that God was speaking there through the words and gestures of the liturgy. My Dad, a Scottish Presbyterian till he became a Catholic at the age of seventy-one, loved the Scriptures, and his interest and fascination encouraged my own: I remember his enthusiasm for the television talks and books of William Barclay, a biblical scholar of the time at Glasgow University, whose commentaries on the Gospels, lively and straightforward, are still in print, and still worth reading and praying.

Against this background, it is perhaps not surprising that, to the best of my remembrance, the first time I felt I wanted to be a missionary was at Sunday Mass, when a White Father (Missionary of Africa) was doing a mission appeal in my parish in Scotland. I suppose I must have been only around eight or nine years old at the time, but this missionary's words lit a flame in me which, by God's grace, still burns.

As the years have passed, reflection on this powerful and life-changing presence of God's Word in my childhood has gradually led me into the awe-inspiring realisation expressed so marvellously by Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you... I consecrated you... I appointed you" (1, 5). It's the same realisation articulated for us by John: "All things came into being through (the Word)" (1, 3). In other words, it is in the Word that I live and move and have my being; as Pope Benedict would say, "each of us is a thought of God." The more, the deeper, I hear and respond to the call to be a missionary, the more and the fuller I become my true self. My very existence began with a call, a Word, and I am most alive when I let that call lead and shape me.

You shall go to all to whom I send you. (Jer 1, 7)

And that, too, has been part of my experience: the Word of God does indeed lead. It is a Word that longs to be shared and communicated, to be passed on, and to be savoured together. This communicating Word creates communication across culture and language and generation; this Word sends me and makes me go to persons and communities whom I do not know, and who are different from me in many and important ways.

I can only marvel at the variety and wealth of the persons and places to which the Word has led me. It gives me joy to recall, for example, my time at Gulu Cathedral in Northern Uganda, when, using the LUMKO materials from South Africa, we could witness God's Word being discovered, lived and proclaimed in the Acholi language by the Small Christian Communities of our parish. Part of this experience for me was getting to know some outstanding women and men catechists and community leaders, who deeply loved the Word, as well as being in touch with several of my confreres, with their infectious passion to know and take full account of the Acholi language and culture in the passing on of the Gospel.

Then I became editor of *Leadership Magazine* in Uganda's capital, Kampala. In this urban, multi-ethnic setting, my predecessor as editor had identified the need to offer a rounded and balanced approach to the Scriptures, as an alternative to the unhelpful fundamentalism being aggressively offered by the sects, and in this effort we found willing and competent allies among the Missionaries of Africa and the Sisters of St Paul. In our parish of Mbuya,

there was a great hunger for the Word, and we were able to respond together with a series of Sunday afternoon courses, which buzzed with the excitement of shared discovery and renewed commitment to mission.

I was very fortunate, too, in my assignment in the Philippines. The Salesian parish at Mayapa, not far from Metro Manila, where I went to practise my Tagalog, was engaged in an energetic journey of renewal based on listening to the Scriptures in community, and provided a context where the terror of my first homilies in the Filipino national language gradually became the joy of communicating and sharing across what might have seemed well-nigh insurmountable cultural boundaries. Then, thanks to the open-heartedness of the Claretian Missionaries, there were the years of working with one of the poorest communities in their inner-city Manila parish, with the weekly Eucharist and the Wednesday evening Bible sharing groups.

But these are just examples, and I know that all of us could offer many, many more of our own. The point here is to recognise, celebrate and joyfully re-commit to the true wonder of our call as missionaries; to recognise with gratitude the basic human enrichment it brings; to see that the Word does not turn us first into talkers but above all into listeners; to welcome the marvellous opportunities to hear the Gospel announced to us in so many different languages and out of so many various cultural experiences.

This grace-filled experience, of course, shapes and forms us in so many ways: for example, it means that the Word of God becomes our fundamental prayer; that we commit ourselves to learning with love and respect the language of those with whom we minister and live; that we grow in attentiveness to how God is speaking in persons and events; that we are culturally curious and aware; that we read, study and reflect on the Scriptures with a passion which grows and matures over the years. In one way or another, we learn the truth of what Jeremiah was once to exclaim: “Within me there is something like a burning fire... I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (20, 9).

“I have set before you an open door.” (Rev 3, 8)

“The Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known – it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life” (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 2).

“For you should not think that a renewal of life which is said to be once and for all is enough; but the very newness itself, if I may so speak, must be renewed continually, day by day. For, as the Apostle says: ‘Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day’ (2 Cor 4, 16). For just as the old gets older and older... so too is this new nature

continually renewed. It is possible, then, to pass over from old age and wrinkles to youth; and what is wondrous in this is that while the body progresses from youth to old age, the soul, if it comes to perfection, changes from old age to youth” (Origen).

The Word of God creates us; the Word of God sends us out; and the Word of God gives us life – always. In one way or another, at different times and places, this is surely the experience of all of us: the Word, with which we might be tempted to think we are familiar, flames anew into life; opens up new avenues of reflection, prayer and commitment for us; challenges us to keep growing, to become aware afresh of our potential; reveals new depths; bears new fruit in us; offers new delight; infects us with new joy; sees us through difficult times; keeps us humble and grounded when things go well.

Little by little it dawns on us that the call, the missionary call, is, surely, to know God’s Word, and to witness and proclaim and live it; to hear and receive and share it; to give it form in this world and at this time – all of these, yes, but in the end the call is to become oneself a word in the Word: one’s life, one’s way of being and relating, these become the place where the Gospel is made present and proclaimed. As Gregory the Great remarked: “The Word grows with the one who reads it.”

For my own part, I have gradually been discovering three particular spaces where this growth, this ongoing formation, is especially offered. The first of these spaces is the silence of personal prayer in a spirit of liberality and generosity, in the living memory of the Jesus of the Gospels who began his days of mission by listening to and conversing with the Father, and who because of this could say: “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge” (Jn 5, 30). Jesus’ words and deeds, his very being and mission, issued again and again from his Father’s Word.

The second space of growth that has continued to nourish and encourage me in listening to the Word is the Sacrament of Reconciliation celebrated regularly. It seems to me that it is in the grace of this sacrament that the Lord offers us that “disciple’s ear” of which the prophet Isaiah speaks. The peace that accompanies the forgiveness offered by the Lord is an opportunity to listen more deeply to the Word he is constantly speaking in our lives and in the lives of the people we encounter as we live our mission. I especially love Luke 5, 1-11, where Jesus’ response to Simon Peter’s confession is: “Do not be afraid, I will make you a fisher of people.” Mission is reborn from the word of mercy.

The third space I have been finding increasingly helpful in recent years has been regular spiritual direction. I am deeply grateful to the patient men who have accompanied, challenged and encouraged me to discern where and

how the Lord is leading me as a disciple and missionary.

“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking.” (Rev 3, 20)

If, at this point of my life, I were to look for one word to express my personal experience of the way God has dealt with me and communicated with me, that word would be: courtesy. I find this experience beautifully expressed by Pope Benedict in his second book on Jesus. “It is part of the mystery of God,” he writes, “that he acts so gently, that he only gradually builds up *his* history within the great history of mankind; that he becomes man and so can be overlooked by his contemporaries and by the decisive forces within history; that he suffers and dies and that, having risen again, he chooses to come to mankind only through the faith of the disciples to whom he reveals himself; that he continues to knock gently at the doors of our hearts and slowly opens our eyes if we open our doors to him.”

Yes, that’s the way I read the work of God’s Word in my story so far. I find a joyful recognition of my own winding way in the story of the disciples walking to Emmaus. Jesus, God’s Word, walks with their disappointment and fragility first of all in silence: how often his Word to me has been this patient, compassionate and merciful silence. And from silence he moves to asking them about what concerns them: how often the Word has made space for my words, for my perplexities, for my fears, and so has led me into a deeper awareness of what I have lived and am living. Then there is the word of challenge and explanation: how often the Word has indeed been the key to understanding life and living it to the full.

That great English woman of prayer, Julian of Norwich, once asked the Lord what, in the end, he was trying to tell her. “I was answered in inward understanding,” she would write. “Would you know your Lord’s meaning in this? Learn it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show you? For love. Hold fast to this.” “Thus,” she concludes, “did I learn that love was our Lord’s meaning.”

Thus might we say that God’s Word to us elicits two small but powerful words of our own: thank you, and yes—words more than enough to fill a life.

GOING ON PILGRIMAGE DURING THIS YEAR DEDICATED TO CONSECRATED LIFE

Sr. Patricia Murray, IBVM

Sr. Patricia Murray is a member of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters). She was the first Executive Director of Solidarity with South Sudan—a new inter-congregational initiative supported by over 250 religious congregations from many different countries. In April 2014 Sr. Patricia took up the position of Executive Secretary at UISG.

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The Irish philosopher poet John O’ Donoghue once described grace as “the permanent climate of divine kindness; the perennial infusion of springtime into the winter of bleakness.”¹ During these past months the words and symbolic gestures of Pope Francis have made God’s grace tangible time and time again. He has shown how men and women of goodwill, but especially how we as vowed religious, are to be present in a world often marked by a bleakness of enormous proportions which affects the lives of individuals, families and whole sections of society. Some of these graced moments stand out like beacons calling each of us to a transcendence that lies within our human capacity. Perhaps as you read this reflection you will remember a particular moment or phrase that has caught your heart, challenged your imagination and called you forth to a new way of being.

For me one of the most significant moments was the profound tenderness which Pope Francis displayed when embracing Vinicio Rico, the Italian man suffering from neurofibromatosis, the disease which covers his body with growths, swellings and itchy sores. The Pope embraced him spontaneously in St. Peter’s Square without speaking a word. Vinicio, so accustomed to the stares of passersby was almost confused by the Pope’s lack of hesitation. Reflecting later on the encounter he said “He didn’t fear my illness...he embraced me without speaking. I felt great warmth.”² His aunt who was

accompanying him on this pilgrimage to Rome remembered that she looked down at Pope Francis' shoes and thought "yes, this is someone who really walks."³ Although the meeting lasted a little over a minute, Vinicio said that he returned home feeling ten years younger, as if a load had been lifted from his shoulders. This encounter between Pope Francis and Vinicio is a concrete reminder of various meetings between Jesus and men and women afflicted by various types of sickness and exclusion or the sadness felt at the loss of a loved one or of an unfulfilled life. This encounter shows us how we as Christians and religious are to be in the world and what we are to do.

As we begin the Year of Consecrated Life and the year dedicated to preparation for the Synod on the Family, the elements in this moving encounter in St. Peter's Square points to the inner and outer journey that each of us, whether religious or lay, is invited to undertake by Pope Francis. The "spontaneous embrace"; "the absence of fear"; "someone that really walks"; and "the lifting of the load" are all pointers to what needs to happen during a transformational journey. That is what both the Year of Consecrated Life and the Synod on the Family invite us to undertake. In the Apostolic Letter to announce the beginning of the special year, religious and their lay companions are called to reflect on the aims of this special time.

Someone that Really Walks

Firstly, during the Year of Consecrated Life, religious are invited *to remember and be grateful* for all that has been within their past histories. Walking back through history, religious can remember how the call of Christ led their founders to read the signs of the times in different centuries and to respond courageously by shaping different forms of religious life to meet the needs of their day. Some left their homelands, crossed oceans and travelled to the edges of the known world to bring the liberating message of the Gospel to different nations and cultures. For others within the monastic tradition, the daily rhythm of prayer and work was a way of being in companionship with a needy world. Others saw the potential that male and female religious could offer in moving out of monastic enclosures to meet the need for education and health care and to respond to every kind of social need. More recently, new forms of consecrated life seek to have their members live at the heart of ordinary life, in regular places of employment, living as good neighbors in their local communities. There is much to be grateful for across the centuries but there are many things for which we must humbly beg pardon individually and corporately.

However, this memory walk of gratitude and penitence is not enough because the Year of Consecrated Life has another clear purpose which is to discover "...a great history still to be accomplished."⁴ Not only are religious

to walk into past history to reflect on their founding charism and its growth and development through time but they must walk towards future horizons where the Spirit is sending them “in order to do even greater things.”⁵ Where are the new peripheries today for religious to go? Like their founders of old and the early members of their congregations, religious need to literally walk to the new edges of need guided by their founding charisms. Those most in need today rarely come knocking on convent or monastery doors; they don’t necessarily come looking for priests or religious. They are often disillusioned with institutions – including the Church – which have seemed so indifferent to their personal and family struggles. Like Pope Francis, religious have to look like people “who really walk”, who are willing to physically go and walk through city slums, no-go areas and struggling rural areas, in order to knock on doors, stop people in the streets for a chat, locate places where conversations are taking place, and make friends so that as a kindly presence they can offer a helping hand to a brother or sister.

A Spontaneous Embrace—Without Fear

This Year of Consecrated Life also calls religious *to live the present with passion*. The Apostolic Letter clearly says that we must see “if and how we too are open to being challenged by the Gospel; whether the Gospel is truly the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make.” If the Gospel is to be the source of passionate living, we must discover its freshness anew. It must become our daily manual for life. We must read it and reflect and discern how and where it is calling us forth. The Apostolic Letter points out that living the present with passion means becoming “experts in communion”, “witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design”.⁶ In our fractured world, religious men and women need to become witnesses of encounter and of true communion.

In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.⁷

Pope Francis encourages religious to be present in the midst of places of conflict and tension in order to be a credible sign of unity. In South Sudan today the international inter-congregational project called Solidarity with South Sudan is one such witness. The various members of the Solidarity communities, by their very presence, coming as they do from many different cultures, witness to the diversity of the human family and the richness that is born when persons are respected and gifts are shared. Their passion for the

Gospel and their commitment to the people of South Sudan, who have suffered the ravages of war, means that they stay when the situation becomes increasingly fragile. These international communities also point to the need for all of us to examine how we relate to persons from different cultures, as our cities, towns and communities become increasingly multi-cultural. In community life, religious need to ask how well we enable each member to be accepted with his or her particular culture and background, and to examine how we allow each other to become co-responsible for the mission and ministries of the congregation.

The Talitha Kum anti-trafficking project, another international inter-congregational initiative, is another powerful witness of communion. Individual sisters and brothers supported by their communities walk the streets of their various countries, warning isolated communities of the danger of human trafficking while providing refuge in shelters for those who have been rescued. Other religious advocate for the necessary laws to prosecute the perpetrators; while others denounce corrupt police, custom officials and mafia networks who oppress their brothers and sisters. The partnership between religious and laity helps to create a powerful network of life.

Religious in so many parts of the world stand alongside landless farmers; victims of war; migrants and refugees; and those held in different types of slavery. The Pope reminds religious that as their founders and foundresses reached out in charity and justice to be in service to those in need, so today we must ask ourselves again whether our ministries and our presence faithfully respond to contemporary needs in the light of congregational charisms. Our responses must be creative and adapted to the cultures and contexts in which we find ourselves.

The spontaneous embrace between Pope Francis and Vinicio symbolizes the deep union that can happen in a short space of time when a real encounter takes place between two people. There is an absence of fear, genuine warmth flows forth and creates communion. Some days ago I listened to a sister from India speaking about her congregation's work with young women who had been trafficked. The sisters go at night with the police into the dark lane ways and hidden brothels to rescue women and young girls who have become trapped in prostitution. The work is dangerous but these sisters are fearless. I can still hear her saying: "If I have to die so that the world will acknowledge the enormity of this problem, I am willing to do so." The absence of fear and the depth of her compassion remain a powerful memory of her desire to be in communion with her oppressed sisters.

The Lifting of the Load

Finally the Apostolic Letter speaks about the need for religious *to*

embrace the future with hope. Religious life worldwide is facing many challenges – decreasing vocations and ageing members in the Global North and economic difficulties and intercultural challenges in the Global South. In addition, many religious today feel deeply the failures of the past and carry a deep sense of shame. There is a sense of having on occasions failed those in their care who were most vulnerable. Now, from a position of weakness rather than a place of power or privilege, we religious can truly speak about the merciful compassion and the forgiveness of God. We can therefore witness to the truth of the words of Scripture “When I am weak then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10)

In the words of the Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis says: “Let us constantly set out anew, with trust in the Lord.”⁸ We are invited to show, that in our own weakness, we can turn to God and receive His compassionate embrace. What we proclaim is not our own work but the fact that we try to serve as leaven in the Kingdom of God and that sometimes we fail to do so. The cry from Pope Francis to religious to “wake up the world”⁹ requires that we first of all wake ourselves up to the mercy and compassion of God. Having experienced God’s immeasurable loving kindness we can take up the task to awaken others and go forth. The load of our human frailty has been lifted and we can show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we *need not seek our happiness elsewhere; that “the joy of the Lord is our strength.”*¹⁰

A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine...¹¹

We are challenged to find ways to create “alternate spaces”, where the way of the Gospel—a way of self-giving, communion, of embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive. We are being encouraged to spread the ideal of fraternity, pursued by our founders and foundresses, throughout the world, like ever widening concentric circles and to make our life into “a sacred pilgrimage”.

There is much to do—the pilgrimage of life continues but we know that God accompanies us along the way. To conclude, I refer once again to the words of John O’Donoghue. When pondering the mystery of grace he wrote:

Grace...suggests how fluent and seamless the divine presence is. There are no compartments, corners or breakages imaginable in the flow of grace. Grace is the permanent climate of divine kindness. It suggests a compassion and understanding for all the ambivalent and contradictory dimensions of the human experience and pain. This climate of kindness

*nurtures the sore landscape of the human heart and urges torn ground to heal and become fecund.*¹²

May the grace of God nourish, restore and renew us during this Year of Consecrated Life.

¹ John O'Donohue *Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

² CNN, Online November 27th, 2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 21 November 2014, #1.

⁵ Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, #110.

⁶ Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Religious and Human*

Promotion, 12 August 1980, 24 I L'Osservatore Romano, Suppl., 12. November 1980, pp. 1-VIII.

⁷ Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to All Consecrated People, #2.

⁸ Ibid. #3.

⁹ Ibid., II, #2.

¹⁰ Nehemiah 8:10.

¹¹ Ibid., II, #4.

¹² John O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

DOROTHY STANG, WITNESS AND COMPANION ON THE JOURNEY OF THE VITA CONSECRATA IN LATIN AMERICA

Sr. Zenilda Luzia Petry, FSSJ

Sister Zenilda Luzia Petry, religious of the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters of Saint Joseph, has lived nearly twenty years in the Amazon region. She was president of the Religious Conference in Brazil and lived in Belém region, Pará, at the time of the murder of Sister Dorothy and the judgement of her assassins. This article is based on other articles by the same author.

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Original is Spanish

The world does not demand discourse on fidelity to Jesus and to the cause of the Kingdom, but living testimonies that give credibility to the Gospel. We need martyrs, in the deepest sense of the word, that is to say, people who are able to give a testimony in the midst of so many contradictions.

Given the objective to highlight the fact that the project of a revitalized and new VC in this continent, is in the heart, in the spirit, in the action and in the proclamation of a group of consecrated women and men who have preceded us and who have sown the seed, the testimony of the life and martyrdom of Sr. Dorothy Mae Stang is a great proclamation of fidelity. The life and martyrdom of Sr. Dorothy Mae Stang were certainly seeds thrown in the ground, which are germinating into new hopes. Even as her body was buried in the sacred soil that received her spilt blood, a great prophecy was proclaimed: *We are not burying Sr. Dorothy; we're planting her body in this earth so that her life will bear much fruit.*

1 – Dorothy Mae Stang – Biographical Information

Sr. Dorothy was born on 7 June 1931 in Dayton, United States, and died on 12 February 2005 in Anapu, in the state of Pará, Brazil. Sr. Dorothy was

a North American religious and naturalized Brazilian. She belonged to the Congregation of Notre Dame de Namur. She entered the congregation in 1950 and pronounced perpetual vows in 1956. From 1951 to 1966, she taught in schools of her congregation in the United States.

Sr. Dorothy arrived in Brazil in 1966. Her mission in Brazil began in the city of Coroatá, state of Maranhão, a very poor region, with a large number of the population uneducated, and where conflicts about land were numerous. With her sisters, she initiated education projects, women's groups, founded schools and other activities, according to the needs of the community. That region who received the one who would write the history of Brazil still remembers her fondly.

With the opening of the Trans Amazonian Route and the beginning of the occupation of the Amazon region promised by the military government of Brazil, many inhabitants of Maranhão left that state and went to look for other lands and new life conditions. Sr. Dorothy, an itinerant prophet, considered that her mission was to accompany these different groups who were displacing themselves towards the Amazon.

Thus, from 1970, she began to work with the rural workers in the region of Xingu. In her missionary activity, education was always a priority. Everywhere she went, schools were constructed, and children, the young and adults were taught. Among her innumerable initiatives in favour of the most destitute, Sr. Dorothy helped in the foundation of the first school for the formation of teachers on the Trans Amazonian Route, a route which cuts in half Anapu. It was *Escola Brasil Grande* (the Great Brazil School).

Beyond education and her evangelical strength, Sr. Dorothy sought to create employment and revenue through projects of reforestation of degraded zones with rural workers in Pará. Her work also sought to regulate the agrarian conflicts in the region, which were numerous. She acted on different fronts in the Amazon region, always looking to go to the peripheries of the peripheries.

Because of her choice of life, and because she perceived the largeness of the Gospel, she actively participated in social movements in Pará. She was a member of the Pastoral Commission of the Earth (CPT) and the National Episcopal Brazilian Conference (CNBB) since its foundation, and accompanied with determination and solidarity the life and the struggle of workers of the Trans Amazonian Route region. Defending a just and coherent agrarian reform, Sr. Dorothy was constantly in dialogue with the those responsible, political and religious, looking for durable solutions to the conflicts tied to the ownership and the exploitation of the land in the Amazon Region. Her participation in Durable Development Projects (PDS) went beyond the frontiers

of the small village of Sucupira, in the town of Anapu, in the state of Pará, to 500 km from Belém to Pará, to obtain national and international recognition.

All along the way, she received numerous death threats, without being intimidated. Priests, religious and lay people who worked with her recount episodes, sometimes colourful, that show how she reacted to death threats. Her life became a gift, and she knew that she could be assassinated at any moment. Meanwhile, as “an angel of the Amazon” as many fondly called her, she seemed always protected by her “guardian angel”. In complicated situations, Sr. Dorothy kept an almost ingenious simplicity that made all difficulties disappear. A short time before her assassination, she declared: *I will not run away, nor abandon the struggling farmers who are abandoned in the middle of the forest. They have a sacred right to a better life and a place where they can live and produce in dignity, without devastating anything.*”

While from one side, the desire to eliminate her grew, on another side her action was recognized at the national and international levels. Thus, on 10 December 2004, two months before her brutal assassination, she received the Order of Lawyers of Brazil (Pará section) for her struggle in favour of human rights.

Sr. Dorothy was assassinated at the age of 73, on 12 February 2005, at 7:30 in the morning, on a road difficult to access, at 53 km from the centre of the town of Anapu, in the state of Pará, Brazil.

According to a witness, before receiving the bullets that took her life, as they asked her if she was armed, Sr. Dorothy affirmed “Here is my weapon!” in showing a Bible. She would have read a few passages to the one who fired the shots.

2 – The Testimony of Sr. Dorothy

In this caravan of people who made history, in times of seduction for wealth, voracious profits, demolition of planet earth, unlimited greed for the Amazon, consumption “that cannot last,” Sr. Dorothy sensed God’s presence in paradise, the “evening breeze” (Gn 3, 8). She saw in the forest a sacred space of divine revelation, she thought it possible to manage intelligently the natural resources and she believed in the harmony of origins between the Creator and his creation. For her, the human person was the guardian, the cultivator of all creation. Sr. Dorothy was plunged in the mystery of God who puts at the disposition of humankind all the fruit of the garden, as related in the book of Genesis, while forbidding them access to the *tree of life* (Gn 2, 17), that is to say in not permitting them to manipulate or to commercialize life. Life cannot be violated because it belongs to the divine sphere. Sr. Dorothy battled with all her strength against the commercialization of life, of

the life of all species.

Sr. Dorothy understood this divine order in a concrete manner. The life of persons, of forests, animals, all the biodiversity of the earth planet must be preserved and cannot be commercialized. She translated this belief to concrete action and left us among other things as heritage the PDS – *Projector de Desarrollo Sustentable* (Sustainable Development Project), a project which now makes reference for those who seek alternative propositions of life on this earth, and which was defined “the Amazonian style of making Agrarian Reform”, approved by the Federal Government. If we consider her intuition and the dream which is the origin of the project, the acronym PDS could signify not “Durable Development Project”, but *Divine Project of Salvation of the Amazon region*.

The scenario of the murder of Sr. Dorothy clearly highlights the testimony of her life. Her death was caused by six gun shots, certified by the assessment, located as follows: one shot to the head, another in the chest and another in the abdomen, and the others were found around her body. Here is how we interpreted this: Her assassin wanted to silence her ideas (shot to the head), to kill her sentiments of compassion for the excluded (shot to the heart), to destroy the ability to engender life (shot to the abdomen), and to eliminate all adhesion of the settlers to the Sustainable Development Projects (shots around the body).

Sr. Dorothy was known as a consecrated woman, convinced and happy. With her regard always focused on the defence of the life of the poor, in search of dignity and citizenship for the destitute, she incarnated an austere manner of being and living. Austerity and simplicity, united with a permanent joy and an unwavering faith are the characteristics of the testimony she left.

Her death had international repercussions, and many people attributed it to the fact that she was North American. But for those who knew Sr. Dorothy, her NA origin was not taken into account. More than anything else, it was her life that was impressive. Her tenderness, her consistency, her visceral love for the life of the poor, her total and unconditional gift of self to the cause she defended, her ingenuity faced with human wickedness, her maturity, all this made the cry of her brutal murder reverberate worldwide. Sr. Dorothy was certainly a harbinger of a new age. Her regard broke boundaries and surpassed horizons only known by those who are clothed with an evangelical mystique, characteristics of the great prophets.

Through this fascinating journey, Sr. Dorothy left us a sacred heritage constantly menaced by dilapidation, devastation, destruction. We continue to violate God’s commandment not to approach *the tree of life*. We destroy forests, we covet lands, and we destroy dreams.

Sr. Dorothy's legacy needs angels posted at the gates of paradise (cf. Gen 3: 24) to defend and protect the garden from the voracious predatory snakes of all time. It is up to all people of good will to defend this sacred heritage.

Facing the neoliberal model of individualistic society, consumerist and predatory, Sr. Dorothy's testimony is a cry which continues to resonate and call for new ways to protect life.

Sr. Dorothy had the intuition that sustainable development of forests, water and soil can save the planet and all that lives there. For the Church, Dorothy Stang is a reference of fidelity to Jesus, a strong prophetic voice, the witness of a different consecrated religious life. Sr. Dorothy is an icon of the incarnation of the Gospel.

In 2015, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of her death. The sacred legacy of Sr. Dorothy must be defended and diffused. This heritage must be cultivated: think beyond the order of established horizons, cultivate sentiments of kindness, gratitude, generosity, and create new forms of social and religious organizations.

3 – Sr. Dorothy's Heritage

As might be expected, the legacy left to us by Sr. Dorothy is constantly menaced. The population of Anapu, like all peoples, is made up of people with different perspectives. Regarding the groups of families who adhered to the mystique of the Sustainable Development Project (PDS), the martyrdom of Sr. Dorothy further highlighted the strength and greed of groups and persons motivated by opposing projects. On the other hand, her death awakened up the conscience, sometimes a bit asleep, of many people, which concretised itself for families by actions of resistance, in solidarity and the certitude of the path to follow, with a stronger network of solidarity. This rendered stronger the people of Anapu. Martyrdom is always a source of resurrection. Sr. Dorothy was murdered, but she is very much alive in the life of those who are in communion with her dream.

If we look at the immediate results, we are tempted to think that her death was in vain. We would like the certitude that the legalization of lands for the families of the PDS had finalized the dispute in that region. We dream that the cry in favour of the preservation of forests and the Amazonian biodiversity be heard by all human creatures. But we are not there yet. In what concerns the state, there are gaps in the application of the law; the protected zone is not respected and human greed continues to surpass the limits. But at the same time, consciousness deepens that the sacred heritage of Sr. Dorothy must be defended with great courage and concrete actions.

History will tell the greatness of this legacy. But the person of Sr. Dorothy, her journey, her manner of being and acting, her stubborn defense of the rights of the poor to access education, health, lodging, land to cultivate to be able to live, is in itself a legacy in the defense of human rights. Her love of the forest, for the soil that our feet have trodden, her sensitivity to biodiversity in the Amazon, her defense of water and air, her indignation at the forest fires that destroy so many forms of life, is another aspect of this legacy. Dying with the Bible in hand while claiming that it is the weapon from which she never parts, taking care as she did in life and communities, her manner of incarnating the Gospel in the concrete reality of her life, all this is a living heritage that cannot be squandered.

Already ten years have passed since assassins' bullets, fired by assassins, ordered by assassins, silenced the prophetic voice of Sr. Dorothy. But her prophecy was not and will not be silenced. Her cry echoes in the vastness of the Amazon forest, it passes through our towns, it penetrates our homes, it enters in religious houses and it trespasses the most diverse frontiers. Before all this, we reaffirm: Sr. Dorothy is a prophet who was killed but who will not remain silent.

4 – Some sentences extracted from letters of Sr. Dorothy

The land is no longer in a condition to feed us. Water and air are contaminated and the soil dies because of the excessive use of chemicals. We must help people to restore the relationship with Mother Earth who is good and loving.

We must learn to have only what we need to live. We must ask ourselves what we need, not what we want. If we all contribute to preserve it, our planet will be healthy.

May God give you wisdom and availability to help build a world where all beings have peace and dignity. Pray for a world where all—plants, animals and humans can live in peace and harmony.

5 - Prayer for Sr. Dorothy

O God of tenderness and mercy, Lord of life and history, who has called us to the fullness of life and who sustains us by your love, arouse in us a great love for our planet earth and all that lives and breathes on it.

That, like your servant Sr. Dorothy Stang, we can defend life wherever it is threatened, cultivate forms of sustainable development, preserve waterways and forests, respect the biodiversity of the planet and fight for justice on this earth.

Grant us the grace to love without measure, to respect creation, to promote new forms of education, and give us strength to resist persecution.

May your Spirit, prophecy made action, defend the sacred heritage of Sr. Dorothy with the weapons of the Word of God with boldness, courage and determination, and coated with an evangelical mysticism.

May Mary, Mother of the poor and our Mother, support sustainable development projects and present to her Son Jesus the birth pains and groans of our creation.

We pray to You, God the Father, through your Son Jesus, in communion with the Divine Spirit, under the loving gaze of Mary. Amen

ARTISANS AND BUILDERS OF PEACE

Sr. Daniella Harrouk, SSCJM

Sr. Daniella Harrouk, Lebanese, is the General Superior of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and the UISG Delegate for the Constellation of the Middle East.

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Original in French

I thank Sr. Carmen Sammut, President of the International Union of General Superiors (UISG) and her Council, and Sr. Pat Murray, Executive Secretary of UISG, in the name of the Constellation of the Middle East, represented here by Sr. Leontine Abou Rjailly and myself. Our gratitude is doubled by our desire to live the Gospel in its dimension of fraternity, solidarity and sharing.

This dimension is echoed by the magisterium of the Church and the Guidance of his holiness Pope Francis in his reflections, his interventions and his messages, certainly in his message for the Year of Consecrated Life. He invites us to a spiritual deepening and resourcefulness, to more apostolic activity and engagement with the poor.

I. Actual Situation

- We are disconcerted by the violence in Syria, in Iraq, in Palestine and in our own country of Lebanon, without excluding Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, South Sudan and Yemen. And the list extends to the African countries of Mali, Nigeria, Tchad...and so on.
- Violence is perpetrated, even sporadically, throughout the world and concerns us, without discouraging us, because our FAITH and our HOPE are based on God's promise "do not be afraid... I am with you until the end of the world" (Mt 14, 27; 28, 20).
- As believers, messengers of the Good News, we are thus called to be everywhere and always artisans and builders of PEACE, on a personal, communal and institutional level. What will this be in the midst of a religious institution that asks us to be witnesses and conciliators?

We have to look briefly at facts that we deplore:

- A. **Violence** affects numerous sectors of society, certainly those who suffer great insecurities. We cannot remain deaf to their cries that are pressing in all aspects of life: food, health and prevention, education and especially prevention of abuses of all kinds (drugs, prostitution, trafficking of women and children).
- B. The **situation** of countries and fragile states through unbridled exploitation of their national resources by international financial firms and developers without faith or law.
- C. The **deconstruction** and the demolition of national systems which threaten, destabilize, and weaken governments, to render them supple to the machinations of great powers, who set themselves up as master usurpers of all people's rights to dignity and self-determination in their national life.
- D. At the heart of troubled countries, **wars** provoked under false pretences (recall the pretext of arms of mass destruction in Iraq and which was proven false, at the base of the United States' invasion). They destroyed cities, villages and entire regions. The soldiers, with sophisticated weapons, attacked homes, economic work places (factories and workshops) and community facilities, and caused the displacement of entire populations to inadequate places and conditions. The situation of poverty which developed has affected the refugees and the countries that receive them. An example: Lebanon with a population of 4 million people, currently hosts, in conditions often inhumane, 1, 800,000 Syrians, with more than 800,000 Palestinians who took refuge over 60 years ago.

II. Interventions and Solidarity in the Human Realm and Economics

The complex and disturbing situation that prevails for decades in all these regions, has deteriorated even more during the last five years. The Church has been attentive and active. Religious Institutions showed themselves everywhere at the height of their charism of service despite the little means that they often had. The cost of these interventions is very high and cannot, in any case, be covered locally in countries in great financial difficulties.

A. *Local Action*

- Convents and schools have welcomed families and taught children; hospitals and health centres have generously given the necessary care to the injured and sick.
- Distributions of food, as first aid, have enabled families to meet emergencies.
- Religious personnel, as collaborators and volunteers, young and adults,

engaged themselves with generosity and devotion, braving, often enough, grave dangers.

- Psychological and pastoral accompaniment focused on this activity, giving it a fraternal perspective in faith and hope.

B. Local Organizations

- The instances of national governments benefiting from international aide often contributed to the action. But the needs are greater than what is received and what gets lost “by way of diversion” more or less acknowledged.
- The local NGOs have been very active in the field and have often enough, compensated for the official shortcomings. Lay people or members of religious groups have effectively demonstrated that human solidarity can work miracles.
- We would like to emphasize the generosity and the courage of lay volunteers, believers and non-believers, Christians and Muslims, investing themselves without counting the costs, in the service of their brothers and sisters in humanity.

C. Aide and International Solidarity

- We mentioned above the official aide from governments. But it is subject to changes and a sudden ending because it is conditioned by political orientations. I am not going to linger on this sad point because it is shameful that we manage human suffering by political goals.
- Charitable bodies of the Church have never failed us. Enumerating the list would be too long; I will only point out some of them: the Pontifical Mission, the Catholic Relief Service, Oeuvre d’Orient, Missio and Miseror, Caritas International and others from various countries in Europe, America and Australia.
- I would like to highlight the work of the local Red Cross and the International Red Cross, but also the Croissant Rouge, which took over the wounded, the sick and the disabled, without distinction of persons, race, religion, nationality or any other affiliation. These agents with great professional and human qualities, often volunteers, braved all the dangers and continue to do so.
- NGOs and secular associations of various countries and those of other Churches have also made contributions: for example, World Vision, Save the Children, the Associations of Scandinavian and German countries.

A chain of solidarity, cooperation and communion, that I would say, enriches us, allows us to give thanks to God, to live the hope of PEACE and overcome discouragement. With His Holiness Pope Francis we must believe that “Peace is always possible.” How? “With prayer,” he said, “because our prayer is at the root of peace.” (Citation reported by L’Osservatore Romano, January 2015)

TERESA OF JESUS
THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD: THE
TRANSVERSAL AXIS IN HER JOURNEY TO
HUMAN AUTONOMY AND SPIRITUAL
FREEDOM

Sr. Giselle Gómez, STJ

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Introduction

According to the dictionary, autonomy is “the ability to provide for oneself some standards to be implemented and to live according to this position.”¹ But autonomy does not only happen when one sets personal standards. Autonomy implies a social process explained by a social pact and a subjective internal process² that respond to each other.

Autonomy and identity are closely related. There can be no autonomy where the identity is fragmented. Assuming one’s autonomy requires a serious examination of the values by which we define our identity.³ This is why, intentional solitude is necessary for the development of autonomy as a space for creativity, meditation, reflection, time to think, to be in dissension with oneself and to recreate one’s identity. The objective of solitude is to be fully oneself.

Being yourself can only be lived in freedom; or true liberty is the ability to recognize the inner voice that invites us constantly to choose a full and decent life, to give ourselves to it and obey it.

The Experience of God: the Transversal Axis in her Journey to Autonomy and Freedom

In her writings, Teresa recounts her journey towards human autonomy

and spiritual freedom. It is a route marked by the God who saves her, frees her, sustains her and renders her capable of recognizing and obeying the inner voice, the voice that prompts her to choose life in fullness and to obey it.

The experience of God was the transversal axis in her journey from dependence to freedom and the construction of one's identity. Her passionate search for God and her encounter with Him are the heart of the life story that she will share with her sisters and her friends. In that brief account, we enter in that transversal axis which extends throughout her life.

“... all that is not pleasing to Me is but a lie”⁴

Teresa experienced God as the one who, since her childhood, has imprinted in her the way of truth; she lives in tension towards true love, understanding that “*all that is not pleasing to Me is but a lie.*”⁵ On this path, Teresa recognizes that God reveals to her His secrets.⁶ The encounter with God, that Teresa lived as a friendship, is the passion that energized her, introduced her to the depth of her being, there, where the most secret things between God and the person happen.⁷ It gave her the strength to look for alternatives in the society of her time.

Thus, she entered in a personal transformation process that engaged her person, her relationships and her *entourage*. A slow process, not linear but spiral as she describes in the *Mansions*, sustained by the certainty that the “*Lord had omitted nothing to engage her wholly from her young age to His service.*”⁸ During the process, Teresa experiences the pain of her own frailty, her desire to give herself and her resistances.

I passed nearly twenty years on this stormy sea, falling and rising, but rising to no good purpose, seeing that I went and fell again... I had no sweetness in God and no pleasure in the world. When I was in the midst of the pleasures of the world, the remembrance of what I owed to God made me sad; and when I was praying to God, my worldly affections disturbed me. This is so painful a struggle, that I know not how I could have borne it for a month, let alone for so many years.⁹

During this long period when the struggle between *God and the world* made her feel, in her soul, that she is tired of oscillating between two opposites,¹⁰ she experienced God as the one who “*supports*”¹¹ her, who offers a hand,¹² as the infinite Mercy that ameliorates and even hides her mistakes in a way that seemed that He “*transformed my faults, and gave them a golden glow.*”¹³ God was the one who held her in His hands and who gave her great gifts because he knew they were needed so that, in the tasks

that He was going to realize next, she would give Him “the *credit to be pleased to brighten a feeble virtue.*”¹⁴

Entrance to the Prayer Castle¹⁵

Teresa experiences that God wants to communicate with her in various ways.¹⁶ She knows that God wants her to understand and rejoice at the fact that He is “*so close to her that it is not necessary to send messengers to Him but that she can speak directly with Him, without voicing aloud because He is so near that He understands her even if she only moves her lips.*”¹⁷

For her, the entrance to this relationship is prayer. She is convinced that to live this relationship, only *love and regularity*¹⁸ are needed, not even bodily forces. Prayer has moments that are reserved for her but it is also a way of living in relationship with God “*while being often in conversation, alone, with Him whom we know loves us.*”¹⁹ Being with Him, without getting tired with much thinking, simply being there, understanding reduced to silence, occupied with “*Looking at Him who looks at her.*”²⁰

In this long journey, she feels that God is offering her freedom. She has lived with the agonizing sensation of feeling *ground to pieces*,²¹ in the fatigue of living cut off from the center of gravity that sustains and gives sense, God Himself. She had the desire to live but she felt that she “*struggled with the shadow of death*” and that her soul was *wearry*.²² Eventually, her weariness led her to surrender to the God of life.

Through prayer, God made her taste His presence in all things²³ and lights within her a “*spark of His true love so that she understands what true love is.*”²⁴ In abandoning herself to His love,²⁵ Teresa was able to experience a new life: “*the life that until today is mine, the life that I have lived since I began to report these things about prayer, it is the life that God lives in me.*”²⁶

On the journey during that long vital process, Teresa was born anew: “*She grew wings enabling her to fly*”²⁷ and “*to do good to her neighbor almost without realizing it.*”²⁸

Jesus, true friend²⁹

For Teresa, Jesus is the gateway to the unfathomable riches of God’s greatness. The Humanity of Christ as it was called by the spirituals of her time will lead her to the experience of the indwelling Trinity: “*It seemed*

to me that in my soul there were these three Persons that I was seeing and who communicated with all creation... ”³⁰

Teresa has travelled the path of personal friendship with Jesus, in whom she finds a *true friend*³¹ *from whom all good things come*³² and which she *desires to engrave in her soul*.³³ She affirms that: *It is through this door, as I saw it clearly, that we must enter, if we want the Sovereign Majesty to reveal to us great secrets.*”³⁴ Jesus will be the way and it is He who will teach her.³⁵ Whoever does not have the practice of meditating on that sacred Humanity “*walks on air, as we say. The person lives, in fact, as deprived of all support.*”³⁶ “*We are not angels, we have a body. To seek to make ourselves angels while we are on the earth is an act of folly.*”³⁷ This is why, “*Jesus is a very good friend for us. We consider Him as a man, and we see Him with weaknesses and sufferings; He becomes company for us, and when we are accustomed, it is easy to find Him close to oneself.*”³⁸

As Teresa progresses on the way, she believes that God Himself gives her the grace to understand *something wonderful*: the Trinity lives within her. “*There, the three adorable Persons communicate with her soul, speak to her, and give her the understanding of our Lord’s words in the Gospel: Anyone who loves me will keep my commandments, and my Father will love them, we will come to them and we will make our home within them.*”³⁹

Contemplating Jesus⁴⁰

This spiritual journey required Teresa to enter within herself. The path that she describes is based on a knowledge that comes when we “*enter within oneself.*” At first, one must recognize that the heart has many attachments that “*do not permit her to see the beauty of the castle or to find rest.*”⁴¹ But, it is not enough to remain at this level of understanding; one must go a step further to discover that God has given us a great dignity. It is in contemplating Jesus that we learn true humility; self-knowledge is not given to “*thieves and cowards.*”⁴²

For Teresa, prayer must begin and end with self-knowledge because it is the foundation of true humility that implies walking in the truth.⁴³ She is sharp in her affirmations. One must never abandon self-knowledge... “*This is the bread that accompanies every meal, however delicate they are, as without this path of prayer and this bread, one could not be nourished...*”⁴⁴ She “*gives thanks to the Lord for a day of humble self-knowledge, even if it has cost many afflictions and works, besides many prayers.*”⁴⁵

*Walking in the truth*⁴⁶ all her life, led her to experience the *supreme Truth*,⁴⁷ to live always on this *watchtower from where truths are revealed*,⁴⁸

familiarized with *the life of her God*.⁴⁹ Thus, she lived united with God, who rendered her capable of participating in His divine nature.⁵⁰ This is what she calls *spiritual marriage*⁵¹ where Jesus says to her: “*You will care for my honor as my true spouse.*”⁵² Founded on that experience, she lived in His service with the conviction that the reason for prayer and spiritual marriage is “*to generate works, works.*”⁵³

Conclusion

Theresa is deeply convinced that we are all called to this profoundness. It seems urgent to her to recall that God “invites everyone,”⁵⁴ and that all will live in inner harmony when “*people will commit themselves to the Highest Good, knowing what He knows, loving what He loves, and enjoying what He enjoys.*”⁵⁵ The familiarity with God that was revealed to her in Jesus is not reserved for a select few. She dares to ensure “*Let none draw back from entering here, for His Majesty also said: ‘Not only for them do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me’ and He declared: I am in them...*”⁵⁶ She was fully convinced that God desired to reveal Himself to all.

Teresa experienced Jesus as a true friend. She felt Him in the deepest recesses of her heart and could not doubt. She knew His fidelity and knew that *all things fail but that the Lord, among all things, never fails*. She felt His strength and His support to the point that she dared to say: “*Let the learned rise up against me, let the whole creation pursue me, let the evil spirits torment me, but do Thou, O Lord, fail me not; for I know from experience the blessedness of that deliverance which Thou dost effect for those who trust only in Thee.*”⁵⁷ At the center of her soul, she heard that God was telling her: “*Fear not, my daughter, I Am and I will never leave you, fear not.*” She was certain that God was faithful and that He wanted to give Himself to all.

Teresa is aware of how God’s grace increased within her. She knows “*that few come to experience so much.*” She also knows that “*the Lord gives these graces to many more women than to men... because... they benefit more from the experience than men.*”⁵⁸ This is why, with the approval of God Himself, she dares to affirm what she says “*is an excellent doctrine and not mine but taught by God.*”⁵⁹

- 1 C. Díaz y M. Moreno Villa, *Autonomía y Heteronomía*, en M. Moreno Villa (ed.) *Diccionario de Pensamiento Contemporáneo*, Ediciones San Pablo, Madrid 1997, pp. 120 – 125.
- 2 Cf. T. López Pardina, *Autonomía*, en C. Amorós, *10 palabras clave sobre mujer*, pp. 151 – 162 y M. Lagarde, *Para mis socias de la vida*, p. 71.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 4 The Book of "Life" 40, 1.
- 5 The Book of "Life" 40, 1.
- 6 The Book of "Life" 40, 1.
- 7 I Mansions 1, 3.
- 8 The Book of "Life" 1, 8.
- 9 The Book of "Life" 8, 2.
- 10 The Book of "Life" 7, 1. 17. 8, 2.
- 11 The Book of "Life" 8, 8.
- 12 The Book of "Life" 7, 22.
- 13 The Book of "Life" 4, 10.
- 14 The Book of "Life" 7, 17 – 18.
- 15 I Mansions 1, 7.
- 16 The Way of Perfection 34, 10.
- 17 The Book of "Life" 14, 5.
- 18 The Book of "Life" 7, 12. 8, 4.
- 19 The Book of "Life" 8, 5.
- 20 The Book of "Life" 13, 22.
- 21 The Book of "Life" 17, 5.
- 22 The Book of "Life" 8, 12. 9, 1.
- 23 The Book of "Life" 18, 15.
- 24 The Book of "Life" 15, 4.
- 25 The Book of "Life" 9, 3.
- 26 The Book of "Life" 23, 1.
- 27 The Book of "Life" 20, 21.
- 28 The Book of "Life" 19, 3.
- 29 The Book of "Life" 22, 6.
- 30 Recitations 18.
- 31 The Book of "Life" 22, 6.
- 32 The Book of "Life" 22, 4.
- 33 The Book of "Life" 22, 4.
- 34 The Book of "Life" 22, 7.
- 35 The Book of "Life" 22, 7.
- 36 The Book of "Life" 22, 9.
- 37 The Book of "Life" 22, 10.
- 38 The Book of "Life" 22, 10.
- 39 VII Mansions 1, 6. 2, 8.
- 40 I Mansions 2, 11.
- 41 I Mansions 1, 8.
- 42 I Mansions 2, 11.
- 43 VII Mansions 4, 8.
- 44 The Book of "Life" 13, 15.
- 45 The Foundations 5, 16.
- 46 VI Mansions 10, 7
- 47 VI Mansions 3, 8
- 48 The Book of "Life" 21, 5
- 49 Exclamations 17, 3
- 50 Exclamations 17, 3
- 51 V Mansions 4, 3; VII M 1, 2. 3; 2, 1 – 3; VII M 4, 6.
- 52 Relations 35.
- 53 VII Mansions 4, 6.
- 54 The Way of Perfection 19, 15.
- 55 Exclamations 17, 5.
- 56 VII Mansion 2, 7 – 8.
- 57 The Book of "Life" 25, 17.
- 58 The Book of "Life" 40, 8.
- 59 The Book of "Life" 19, 13.

Since the last Bulletin there have been many interesting events and developments at UISG.

Canon Law Council: In early March the first meeting of the newly established Canon Law Council took place. The five members of the group under the able leadership of Sr. Mary Wright, IBVM come from different continents - Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America. They have planned two exciting events in the future:

- (a) A meeting in December 2015 of a representative number of women religious canon lawyers who advise religious communities in different parts of the world. We are still trying to identify sister canonists from Latin America and Asia.
- (b) In May 2016 before the UISG Assembly, a two day workshop for Superiors General which will take place here in Rome.

This initiative is being sponsored by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and we are very grateful for their support. Sr. Mary Wright, IBVM (English); Sr. Marjory Gallagher, SC (English and French) were available for a two month period to offer canonical advice to congregational leaders through personal interviews, Skype and phone conversations, and by E-mails. Sr. Tiziana Merletti, FSP (English, French and Italian), will be available for consultation during the first week of July. This service is ongoing and if you would like to make contact with one of them please contact the UISG office.

Zambian Educational Research Project. During the second week of March a meeting of the planning group took place. David Tuohy, SJ—an educational consultant—was joined by sisters representing the Zambian Association of Sisters (ZAS), the Association of Conferences of Women Religious of Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA), the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and representatives of interested donors. The aim of the project is the development of a process to help leaders of religious congregations to plan their future educational needs in order to sustain their congregations and their ministries. It is hoped that the project will develop a planning instrument that will help other congregations worldwide. We are grateful to the GHR Foundation for sponsoring the initial phase of this study.

Meetings with Embassy Officials. One aspect of the work at UISG that has grown over the years is increasing contact with Embassies to the

Holy See. Ambassadors and other officials value the information that sisters can provide because of their ministry close to the daily lives of people in many countries. Recently a group of sisters from several African countries met with the UK Ambassador to the Holy See, Nigel Baker, to speak about their experience of sexual violence against women in their countries and regions. In June 2014 the UK hosted a Global Summit to try to end “Sexual Violence Against Women in Conflict.” The Ambassador believes that women religious in many parts of the world can play an important role in tackling this crime.

The new Irish Ambassador to the Holy See, Emma Madigan, came to visit the staff at UISG to understand its role in the church and the world. She was particularly interested in the coordinating work of Sr. Gabriella Bottani, CMS, against human trafficking in the Talitha Kum office.

The U.S. embassy to the Holy See hosted a meeting with Rebekah Gregory who was badly injured during the Boston bombing and subsequently lost a leg. Her personal testimony about healing and forgiveness was a most moving experience. She had come to Italy to participate in a mini marathon, and she participated in the recent Boston Marathon.

Assemblies and Conferences: The Executive Secretary, Sr. Pat Murray, IBVM, attended the UCESM Assembly in March – this is the coordinating body of all the 38 National Conferences of Religious in Europe. The theme of the Assembly, which was held in Tirana, was “**Religious Men and Women in Europe: Witnesses and Shapers of Communion.**” One day of the conference was spent with the religious of Albania at Scutari, where the cemetery and former prison commemorate the Catholics, Muslims and members of the Orthodox Church who were martyred during the communist period. A panel of religious leaders who spoke during the Assembly and a meeting with political leaders reiterated the belief and commitment of all that all the religions in Albania had an important role to play to peace building. The following words of Pope Francis spoken during his visit to Albania were often quoted: “Authentic religion is a source of peace and not of violence. No one must use the name of God to commit violence.”

In April, the President of UISG, Sr. Carmen Sammut, SMOLA, and the Executive Secretary attended a conference on **Women in the Church: Perspectives in Dialogue** at the Antonianum. This conference was sponsored by the Pontifical University of the Antonianum and the Chilean Embassy to the Holy See. Sr. Mary Melone is the first female rector of a Pontifical University.

At the **Nun in the World: Catholic Sisters and Vatican II Conference**

hosted by The Cushwa Notre Dame University Centre in London, a number of very interesting academic papers were presented. They covered a wide range of topics related to the challenges faced by religious women before, during and after Vatican II. These papers served as a reminder of the courage and creativity of leaders of women's congregations when facing monumental changes from the 1960s onwards. The papers provided much needed encouragement in relation to the new challenges that leaders of congregations face today. The conference showed the importance of keeping good archives and of training sisters or employing lay personnel to write about significant moments in the history of our congregations.

On the final day of the conference the report of **The Religious Life Vitality Project** was presented to the conference participants and to those who had participated in the survey and group conversations. Many women religious from the UK and Ireland had participated in the project. The researchers led by Sr. Gemma Simmonds, CJ, identified a number of significant themes which will require further reflection by the participating congregations.

Strategic Planning Process: Ms. Helen Harrington, the organizational consultant who has been working with the Executive Board on the strategic planning process, met with the Board in May to reflect on the responses received. We thank all of the Constellation delegates, members of UISG and collaborators who responded to the recent questionnaire. A report of progress to date will be issued later this year.

Meetings and Events at the Vatican

Many hundreds of formators came to Rome in April for the very successful Seminar organized by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL). At the recent May meeting of the Council of 18 with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the topic discussed was: "How Can Institutes of Pontifical Right in Africa contribute to the process of discernment and formation required of new religious communities of Diocesan Right, before, during and after being approved by the Holy See." Since most Congregations of Pontifical Right had themselves being mentored by established congregations in their beginning phase, this topic led to a fruitful reflection and helpful discussion. The Council of 16 meeting at CICLSAL was cancelled due to a visit by Pope Francis to the Dicastery on the same morning.

Migrants Project in Sicily: Sr. Carmen Sammut, MSOLA, and the Executive Board are very grateful for the response to the letter sent

regarding the new inter-congregational initiative to respond to the needs of the thousands of migrants arriving in Sicily. They are very grateful to the congregations who have volunteered personnel and sent financial support so that this important initiative can begin. The members of the planning group - Srs. Elisabetta Flick, SA, Fernanda Cristinelli, CMS and Carmen Elisa, SSps – have visited Sicily on several occasions and met with several Bishops and many religious and diocesan personnel. The sisters who have volunteered met with members of the Executive Board of UISG, the Executive Secretary and members of the planning group in Rome on June 8-9. The next steps of the project were planned together. It is hoped to have at least two communities established in Sicily in November after a period of preparation in Rome. We encourage you to continue to support this UISG initiative for migrants, which hopefully will be replicated in other parts of the world.

Goodbye and Immense Gratitude: At the end of June Sr. Sarah Crowley, SMG, who has welcomed visitors to UISG for twenty years, will leave her post. In that time she has greeted so many with such warm hospitality that she will be greatly missed. She was the face of UISG to those who arrived at the door and a most encouraging and collaborative member of staff for all who worked with her. Before coming to UISG, Sr. Sarah was the principal of her congregation's school in Florence and at UISG she used her teaching skills to help edit UISG publications and reports. Our gratitude to Sr. Sarah for her years of dedicated service and we wish her every blessing in the future.

We also thank Sr. Yvonne Pothier, a Sister of Charity of Halifax (Canada) who has organized the Regina Mundi in Diaspora grant programme for the past two years. She has developed an excellent data base system and the grant application programme now runs very smoothly. We thank Yvonne for her dedicated work and assure her of our prayerful support as she returns to her home country.