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FATHER GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter of 14th March 2008

To Sister Evelyne and all the Daughters of Charity throughout the world,

Dear Sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

On this feast of St. Louise, I would like to thank the Sisters for their imitation of the love St. Louise had for the poor, our Lords and Masters. She did not let illness, inconvenience or lack of physical resources deter her from doing all that she could to serve Jesus Christ in her brothers and sisters.

As I travel throughout the world visiting the Daughters of Charity, I see this same devotion, this same putting aside of self, this same working sometimes with few physical resources and this same great love which is our gift to those we serve.

May the celebration of this feast deepen in you the desire to take Louise as your model in all that you do as you support each other and bring Christ to those you meet every day.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

SISTER EVELYNE FRANCOIS, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of 14th March 2008

To all Daughters of Charity

Dear Sisters,

“I urge you to beg Our Lord to send laborers to do His work. You would not believe how many places are asking for our sisters and how few we have to send.”

(St. Louise, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 501, L. 471)

Happy Feast of Saint Louise de Marillac! May her profound faith, her care for poor persons and her love for her Sisters always inspire us! Let us call on her intercession in a special way this year as we offer to God our prayers for vocations.

Sister Rosalie, Sister Lindalva and Sister Giuseppina, to name only those most recently beatified, are also examples and advocates to encourage us on our own journey and to obtain new workers for us. In my recent visits to Peru, Bolivia and Egypt, I saw so many children, adolescents and young adults in the schools and movements in which we are involved who are fascinated and challenged by the stories of these Sisters' lives.

The Company is making joyful preparations for another beatification, that of Sister Marta Wiecka. As you recall, she was born in Nowy Wiec in Poland in 1874, entered the Company in 1892 in the Province of Cracow, and was then sent to care for sick persons in Lvov, Podhajce, Bochnia and Sniatyn (some of these cities are now part of Ukraine) until her death in 1904 at age 30. Like Marguerite Naseau, she leaves us an example of commitment to corporal and spiritual service of persons who are ill. Her twelve years in the Company were marked by her competent service in hospitals and her gifts in the realm of what is now called health care ministry.

Sister Marta will be beatified by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State for the Holy Father, in the presence of Cardinal Marian Jaworski, the Archbishop of Lvov, on May 24, 2008 in Lvov (a city where she lived and served poor persons in a hospital, but where we no longer have a local community). Many of our Sisters from Poland and the other Slavic countries will participate in this beatification, as well as two Sisters from each of the other Provinces in Europe. Father Gregory, our Superior General, Father Javier, our Director General, all the members of the General Council and I will represent the Company on the international level. Naturally, Father McCullen, Father Maloney, Father Quintano, Mother Duzan and Mother Elizondo will also be among those invited.

On the following day, May 25, we will go to Sniatyn (the city where Sister Marta died and where we currently have a local community) for a celebration of thanksgiving. This beatification in Ukraine has a special characteristic, since it is taking place in a country that has experienced a long history of religious persecution, and where now a certain religious freedom is awakening after many years of militant atheism. It is also worth noting that the Orthodox Christians are in the majority among the Christians and that the underlying ecumenical relations are very positive. Let us pray that our future Blessed will obtain vocations for us as well as an even richer collaboration with our Orthodox brothers and sisters for a better service of persons who are poor.

In this brief Community newsletter, I would once again like to confide to your prayers the Sisters and the poor people in several Provinces affected by catastrophes

due to severe weather or to political situations. Recently, terrible floods have ravaged various regions of Madagascar, Bolivia and Ecuador, and our Sisters have responded by providing emergency assistance and supplies. You have also heard about the serious political conflicts affecting the daily life of the inhabitants of several regions in Colombia. Some of our Sisters even have family members in the hands of FARC. Let us also keep in mind our Sisters in Eritrea who have special need of our prayers; their greatest suffering is in not being able to relieve the suffering of the people as they would wish. Sister Wivine Kisu was able to visit them recently and witnessed the difficulties in their lives and their total dedication.

The episodes of violence disrupting Kenya, Chad and Cameroon seem to be subsiding, thank God, but the pathway towards reconciliation is arduous. In the Near East, the political tangle continues, with disastrous economic consequences which penalize the most vulnerable and threaten the future for Christians. To this list that is already too long, I would also add Algeria, where limits have recently been imposed upon the Priests, Sisters and Pastors, affecting their freedom to carry out their ministries.

Let us present all these intentions to our Heavenly Father with the fervor of Saint Louise and Saint Joseph. Then, as we approach the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection, the heart of our faith, let us follow in the footsteps of Christ, who suffered for us. It is in his victory over death, sin, injustice, suffering and violence that we find the strength to love and to serve. Happy Feasts of Saint Louise and Saint Joseph, a Joyous Easter Alleluia and a Blessed Renovation!

With the assurance of my prayerful affection and devotion,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

REFLECTIONS PRIOR TO THE COMING PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES

THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY

The Provincial Assembly, like all Assemblies, is an ecclesial event that is part of the life of the Church even though it is held without any publicity at all and despite the fact that the Company is exempt. Constitution 1 gives us the reason for this: the Company cannot be understood except in terms of the Church. It is part of the Church and of course it serves the Church in accordance with the charism of its Founders. This simple ecclesial framework leads us to the following conclusion: the Provincial Assembly has to take place with the members being aware of this ecclesial dimension, that is to say, feeling that they are part of the Church and acting in sincere fidelity to it. I think it is important that the Assembly should have this ecclesial

awareness in order to focus its reflections on the wider scenario of the society to which the Province belongs. This broader outlook will help us to avoid the danger of becoming closed in on the narrow margins of domestic problems. It is good, healthy, necessary and desirable to open windows and in a spirit of openness see the Church's concerns and hopes, allowing ourselves to tremble with horror at the real problems facing it. It is from this perspective that all matters, whether at provincial or general level, should be considered.

1. Its objective

Constitution 84a states the aim of the Company's Assemblies: "*to evaluate and promote fidelity to its specific charism and apostolic vitality.*" The word "*evaluate*" asks us to look back over the service we have given and examine how faithful we have been to our Vincentian vocation. Six years is ample time for us to be able to ask ourselves if we have worked and lived in conformity with God's will and the needs of the poor. Evaluation is important and yet the Assemblies cannot just keep looking at the past. They need to project their attention on to the future in order to "*promote*" dynamic fidelity to the Vincentian vocation. So the Company's Assemblies have to take place with two aspects (the past and the future) in mind. "*To evaluate and promote*" are the banner words that should inspire all the reflections and interventions of the Assemblies.

Constitution 86e lists the matters that are to be dealt with at the Provincial Assembly: election of delegates and substitute delegates for the General Assembly and putting forward names for the office of General Councillor. The Provincial Assembly also studies the theme suggested for the General Assembly. It likewise formulates Propositions and Postulates that it wishes to send to the General Assembly, to the Superioress General and her Council, or to the Provincial and her Council. It is, of course, the best time for studying and dealing with Provincial matters. Article 86e of the Constitutions ends by reminding us that the Provincial Assembly "*is consultative and informative, but it is not legislative.*" This means, among other things, that the Provincial Assembly cannot impose its decisions on those who govern at Provincial level. However, those in authority at Provincial level should agree to the decisions and propositions of the Assembly unless there is any reason to oppose them. This is a basic element of governance.

Why are the Assemblies held every 6 years? We live in a time of profound and rapid changes that are social, religious and cultural and these changes have an impact on all Institutions. The Company has to pause in order to reflect and discern how these changes are affecting them. The outcome will determine the responses that the Province has to make. Assemblies, therefore, are all different, not just because the slogan is different each time but also because the reality will be different and there will be new situations that demand our reflection. From this reflection there should emerge priorities and new commitments. This is the dynamic of renovation that can and should be the expected outcome of Assemblies.

2. Docility to the Holy Spirit

The Directory for Provincial Assemblies indicates that the opening of the Assembly should be marked by the Mass of the Holy Spirit and that the "*Veni*

*Creator*¹ should be said in the Assembly hall. Throughout the Assembly there will be other occasions for invoking the Holy Spirit. The entire Assembly should be undertaken with the Spirit's assistance in order to ensure that discernment and any decisions taken are in accordance with God's will. If only the Assemblies could be as clearly aware of the Spirit's help as the disciples in the early Church were: "*It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves...*" (Acts 15, 28).

What does it mean today to be ready to listen to God or to be actively docile to the Holy Spirit during the Assembly? Docility is the attitude of a person who desires to learn and therefore is willing to be taught. What does God want to say to us at this particular time? What does the Lord want of the Province? Starting from the basic conviction that we do not know everything and that it is necessary to discern what God is asking of us, we are ready to listen, to pay attention to others and show respectful understanding of other people. Docility presupposes that there will be no prejudices and therefore purity of intention. It is cordial openness that avoids all forms of obstinacy and stubbornness. When people let themselves be carried away by prejudice they lack the necessary docility for listening to the voice of God and discovering his will; the only thing they can hear is the echo of their own reflections.

God uses many different ways of showing us what he wants of us. In order to respond to God we have to listen to the Sisters. Listening to the voice of God means we have to be able to dialogue. Those who close their minds to dialogue, close their minds to the light of the Holy Spirit and so have no guarantee that they can properly discern the will of God. What use are the dialogues and the debates of the Provincial Assembly if Sisters do not accept beforehand the possibility that they can be enriched and even that they may change their opinions as they listen to other Sisters? Everyone should listen to each Sister and each one should listen to everyone. No voice is to be disparaged, no matter how weak or poor it may seem to be.

3. Participating in a way that shows co-responsibility

The Assemblies are particularly good occasions for practising, more than ever, co-responsibility, and this is done at the three levels that correspond to the different Assemblies, namely, local, Provincial and General. For the moment we are talking about the Provincial level. Why must the Sisters take part in the Assembly very seriously? In order to promote "*fidelity to its specific charism and apostolic vitality.*" (C.84a), and that is something that all the Sisters of the Province, and not just Superiors, are responsible for. The Provincial Assembly is an appropriate way of ensuring the participation of every Sister: the delegates participate in a more active and direct way; the other Sisters participate indirectly through the delegates from their local community, by prayer, by taking an interest in the Assembly's proceedings and accepting the commitments made by its members. Genuine discernment takes place at the Assembly itself and this, as we said earlier, requires the collaboration and participation of all the Sisters in the Province.

THE ASSEMBLY THEME; "PROPHECY AND HOPE, TODAY AND EVERYWHERE"

¹ Cf. *Directory for the Provincial Assembly* p.6

Using the “raw material” provided by the local communities, each Provincial Assembly will look for ways of deepening and making specific the call to prophecy and hope. For my part, after reading the synthesis of some of the Provinces’ findings, I will offer a simple reflection to show how prophecy can affect the different dimensions of the life of the Daughters of Charity. It is just some background music that can provide a setting for the Provincial Assembly.

1. PROPHECY AS APPLIED TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Prophecy does not consist in shouting aloud on behalf of God, even though people may use very well-crafted speeches. St Paul compares persons who speak with their lips but do not have charity, to “sounding brass” or “clashing cymbals.” We don’t mean to suggest by this that the prophet should not proclaim messages and repeat them as often as necessary. However, what people say and the witness they give should come from an inner source. Their words have to be consistent with the lives they lead. The exhortation *Vita Consecrata* maintains that “*prophecy derives a particularly persuasive power from consistency between proclamation and life.*”² Sacred Scripture tells us, “*A man’s words flow out of what fills his heart.*” (Mt 12, 34) reminding us of the need to be careful about what we “cultivate “interiorly.

The root meaning of the word “prophet” is “one who speaks in the name of someone else”, in this case, in the name of God. “*Thus says the Lord*” is a phrase that is often used by the Old Testament prophets to tell the people the message that God, in his turn, communicated to them. So the prophet’s mission is to proclaim to the world God’s will, what He wants them to do. The prophet cannot do this, however, unless he or she has first interiorised the divine will. So, for example, God says to the prophet Ezechiel, “*Son of man, remember everything I say to you, listen closely, and go to your exiled countrymen and talk to them. Tell them, ‘The Lord Yahweh says this’ whether they listen or not.*” (Ez 3, 10-11) On another occasion the Lord orders the prophet to swallow the book containing the message he has to proclaim (cf Ez, 2,7- 3,11). The image could not be more striking. The prophet Jeremiah also tells us that he needed to assimilate beforehand the message he was to proclaim, “*When your words came, I devoured them; your word was my delight and the joy of my heart.*” (Jer, 15, 16).

From what has been said so far, it is clear that the prophet needs to have a profound experience of God, otherwise it would be very difficult to carry out the prophetic mission. This is precisely the thinking of the Church when it speaks of the prophetic nature of the consecrated life. In *Vita Consecrata* we read: “*The consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity....To carry out this service appropriately, consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God.*”³ The experience of God is often identified with the experience of one’s particular vocation. The prophet is someone who feels he has been called, chosen and designated as such by God after experiencing a personal encounter with Him. “*You seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced,*” exclaimed the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 20,7). In these expressive terms the prophet gives us a glimpse of his personal experience of genuinely falling in love with the Lord. The

² *Vita Consecrata* 85b

³ *Vita Consecrata* 73a

prophet Isaiah says “*Here I am, send me.*” This determined response shows us Isaiah’s firm resolve to follow the Lord’s call.

One cannot be a prophet if one’s vocation is wilting, just as it is impossible to light up a dark room if there is no source of power for doing this. We are all familiar with St. Louise’s recommendation to the Sisters missioned to Angers: “*Sisters, renew yourselves in your first fervour.*”⁴ St. Louise’s message to that community is clear: if Sisters do not live their vocation in depth and respond faithfully to its demands, the service of the poor can deteriorate, there can arise an infinite number of complications in community living and the life of Daughters of Charity can cease to be a challenge to people around them and to those who collaborate in their works. Something like this seems to have happened in the community at Angers and St. Louise was gravely concerned. The gospel account of the journey to Emmaus given us by the evangelist Luke (Lk 24, 13-25) shows us very clearly the important effect that a profound encounter with the risen Christ can have in making us his witnesses. The two disciples in the story had been enthusiastic followers of Jesus during his lifetime. The Master’s death, however, had left them sad, discouraged and disappointed. “*Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free but....*” (Lk 24, 21). When these disciples discover that the pilgrim who is journeying with them, who sits at table with them, who breaks bread and gives it to them, is the dead but risen Master, a decisive change immediately takes place in their lives: they find hope again, their faith is rekindled, they leave behind the path of discouragement and become joyful witnesses to the Risen Lord. Their encounter with the risen Jesus has healed their wounds of despair and unbelief. We, ourselves, cannot possibly be witnesses, evangelisers and prophets if we do not encounter the risen Jesus at a deep level, if we do not “cultivate” our experience of God.

The questionnaire for the Domestic Assemblies very rightly pointed to this personal aspect of prophecy at all levels. Many Sisters expressed their joy at discovering that the Assemblies can be a time of real conversion for them as individuals and as communities. If this were not the case, the Assemblies would be mere formalities, leaving everyone exhausted. The Provincial Assembly might ask itself what it could do to help Sisters keep alive the spirit of their vocation and deepen their experience of God which will lead them to give witness to the world about the Risen Christ. What must it do to prevent the prophet growing cold in spiritual matters?

2. PROPHECY IN COMMUNITY LIFE

Our reflection now focuses on the second aspect of the life of a Daughter of Charity; community living. How can the Company’s call for us to be prophets affect our living together as Sisters? I know that the Domestic Assemblies have practised discernment about this and many have even made specific commitments with regard to this matter. This will prove that they are dealing with the realities of life. The Provincial Assemblies must not lose sight of individual local communities because, to give just one reason, the prophetic level of the Province will be the outcome of the prophetic activity of these communities. However, any reflections made at Provincial level must be of a general nature and not be geared to each individual community.

⁴ St. Louise *Spiritual Writings*, 26th July 1644

How can we help communities to be more prophetic and more effective bearers of hope in the socio-cultural-religious context of their Province? Such a question can orient the Province's discernment and this will always be based on the responses sent in by the Domestic Assemblies. For my part, I will just offer you the following reflections.

In the face of a world that is individualistic, prophecy puts the emphasis on fraternal life in common. Individualism is a form of selfishness that tends to undermine the value of fraternity. What can we do about this? The exhortation *Vita Consecrata* stresses the prophetic power of consecrated life in a world torn apart by hatred, ethnic conflicts, nationalism and differences between the generations.⁵ So the only answer to the challenge posed by individualism is fraternal life in common. This life must demonstrate even more clearly than ever before the Lord's new commandment, "*Love one another as I have loved you.*" (Jn 13, 34). The more transparent the sign is, the clearer and more powerful will the message be. It may be that today we need to send out a message more forcefully, given our world's deafness to gospel teachings.

What witness does community living give to people today? It shows that it is possible for people of different ages, cultures and outlook to live together and love one another; that any conflicts that arise from living with others can be overcome by accepting differences, by dialogue and by forgiveness. The witness that communities are called to show to the world is to let people see "how they love one another" in spite of their differences, how they become reconciled after causing offence, and how they share what they have and are. Our world is searching for paths of peace and unity but these are not easily found. Living together in community is meant to show the world that the path of fraternity is indeed a possibility. In 1986 Pope John Paul II invited the Company to give this community witness. "*If individual witness is of value, the witness given by a community increases to an extraordinary degree the spreading of gospel witness and multiplies the impact this has.*" Fraternal communities have an impact on the world because people realise how difficult living in common is these days.

In confronting a philosophy of consumerism, prophecy asks us to have a "simple and sober life style" (C.30b) in keeping with the spirit and aim of the Company and the circumstances of needy people. This was one of the proposals made by the last General Assembly.⁶ It seems clear that a community that is caught up in the maelstrom of consumerism will never be prophetic. It becomes incapable of transmitting any message at all. It has lost what J.B. Metz calls "*shock therapy*" for challenging other people. Consumerism gives rise to a dynamic of endless self-complacency and at the same time it makes people deaf to the cries of the needy. Communities are not immune to this danger of consumerism which is all around us and hold such a fascination for people. What is most worrying is that it can take a hold without the members realising it. One way of responding to consumerism is to discover alternative behaviour patterns, for example, learning the art of being content with little and with a simple life style in community. I emphasise this point because a

⁵ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 51

⁶ *Inter-Assembly Action Lines 2003-2009* p.9

spirit of fraternity naturally leads to multiplying resources and what seems to be little can, in fact, become a great deal.

Faced with a world that is closed in on itself, prophecy points to the need for discernment in order to discover what God is asking of local communities and of the Province today. Surely the first fruit of discernment is openness at all levels – openness of mind and heart, openness of house, of availability and of time. Being closed in on ourselves lets us live in peace and tranquillity but this tranquillity cannot be called prophecy. The person who is open-minded has a greater understanding of vulnerable and excluded members of our society. There has to be openness of hear if we are to accompany them discreetly and with tact. Our houses certainly need to be open to others if they are to find there a welcome that offers genuine human warmth. There has to be availability so that Sisters can collaborate in Provincial projects and participate in works directed by other people. Finally it takes time to establish contacts that are life-giving.

Discernment keeps local communities alive, creative and audacious, as far as this is possible. On the cover page of the Action Lines 2003-2009 document we find again the word “audacity” and it is linked here to a passion for Christ and for the poor. Audacity is one of the attributes of a prophet. Of course, audacity has to bear some relation to the number of Sisters in a community, their ages and their level of vitality. However, these are not the only parameters to be borne in mind. We all know Daughters of Charity and local communities which, in spite of the Sisters’ age remain fully alive and creative. They are continually looking for new ways of adapting their works to new social requirements in order to respond to needs more effectively, and where necessary, they are prepared to start up new works.

3. PROPHECY AND THE INTEGRAL SERVICE OF POOR PEOPLE

4.

Let us now apply the call to prophesy to the third aspect of the life of a Daughter of Charity. What conclusions can we draw from this?

Prophecy reminds us that the Daughters of Charity cannot distance themselves from evangelisation.

This idea has been very evident in the Company since the earliest days of its foundation. One example will suffice. We need only quote this excerpt from the Rules for the Sisters of Angers. *“The Daughters of Charity of the sick poor are going to Angers to honour Our Lord, Father of the poor, and his holy Mother, in order to assist the sick poor of that hospital both corporally and spiritually; corporally by serving them and giving them food and medicines, and spiritually by instructing the sick in matters necessary for salvation and trying to ensure that the sick make a general confession of their entire past life.”*⁷ On numerous occasions Saint Vincent reminded the Sisters that part of their specific way of serving poor people was to evangelise them. The present day call to prophecy highlights this aspect of their life.

In Sacred Scripture the prophets proclaim God’s designs, his holiness and his justice, and they do this by what they say and also by what they do as well as by

⁷ *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charite aux origines*, Documents, sr. Charpy p.247

signs. We should not concentrate too much on the fact that the prophets proclaimed God's justice by what they said or wrote. Their Old Testament writings are proof of this. Each one in his own style and by his own personal response communicated to the people a message which he had firsts assimilated in his mind and heart. Their message came from the way they lived, not from what they said. Their conviction was stronger than any instinct for self-preservation.

In the Bible, the prophets often expressed themselves through symbolic actions, through what they did or through signs. They presented a visual message.⁸ As we now say, a picture is worth more than a thousand words. So, for example, Jeremiah bought a field in Jerusalem at the time when the city was under siege from the forces of Nebuchadnezzar. He did this to tell everyone that God does not abandon his people, the people with whom he made a covenant. He explains his actions in these words, "*For the God of Israel says this, ' People will buy fields and vineyards in this land again.* "(Jr 32, 15). Isaiah walked semi-naked through the streets of Jerusalem to proclaim what was in store for the people of Cush (cf. Is 20, 1-6). Hosea married a woman who had been a harlot, to show that God continues to be faithful to his people in spite of the people's infidelity to God (Hos 1, 1-3)

However, prophecy can never dispense with words even though in our times the language of words is somewhat devalued. *Faith comes from hearing, from listening to what is preached*" St. Paul assures us. And what about symbolic language? Perhaps it is this type of language that appeals more to people today. One place where we can find the prophetic language of signs is in the works that a local community or a Province is undertaking. Each work has a message to convey. Of course, much depends on the way that the work is carried out but I am not referring to this here but to the work itself. There are some works which by reason of their objectives or the place where they are being done are more prophetic than other works although these latter ones are very useful. We have to make a distinction between works that are prophetic and works that are useful.⁹ All the works undertaken by a Province are useful but perhaps they are not all equally prophetic. Works are useful because they provide a necessary service that helps the needy, they give Christian witness and they evangelise. However, these works may be less prophetic because they do not attract or challenge other people; they are not "front line" works. No doubt these works were prophetic when they first started but over time they have lost their prophetic force because other people in the Church and civil societies have taken over as prophets. What can we do to make the works of a Province more prophetic? We say "more prophetic" because, as we have just explained, there are different levels of prophecy. There exist today some works that are still useful but they are no longer so prophetic. So when we make the distinction between "useful works" and "prophetic works" there are different grades of prophecy. It must be said, too, that no Province can hope to see all its works one hundred per cent prophetic.

The service of those in need also leads to prophetic denunciation. In the Scriptures we see how the prophets denounced the unjust practices of those in power. So we can claim that denunciation is part of prophecy. The prophet Habakkuk warns, "*Trouble is coming to the man who grossly exploits others for the sake of the gain of*

⁸ Cf. Luis Gonzalez Carvajal *The Company of the Daughters of Charity at Assembly times* Province of St. Vincent, Madrid, p.9

⁹ Cf. *ibid*, 10-11

his House, to fix his nest on high, and so as to evade the hand of misfortune.” (Hab 2,9). The prophets speak out strongly against actions such as these: according a human being the same value as a pair of sandals (Am 7,4), traders cheating people by tampering with the scales (cf. Am 7,4) or preventing the just cause of a widow being brought before the tribunal (cf. Is 1, 23). The prophet Nathan denounced David for having the warrior Uriah unjustly killed to that he could marry Uriah’s wife (cf. S II, 11 and 12). Elias made the all-powerful Achab face up to the injustice he committed against Naboth in taking over his vineyard (cf. I K 21, 1-29). Saint Vincent opposed Cardinal Mazarin because his policies were impoverishing still more a people who were in dire need. These strong words of his are worthy of the Old Testament prophets, *“My Lord, cast yourself into the sea and the tempest will abate.”*¹⁰ Vincent intervened in the question of war, openly pleading with the First Minister, Richelieu, to bring the conflict to an end.¹¹ With great charity, but also with great frankness, he reproved the Queen, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, for the disastrous consequences their policies were having for the poor people of Paris and the surrounding country areas.¹² This denunciation meant that he had to live for five months away from Paris.

The Company, the Provinces and the local communities cannot refrain from criticising unjust situations around them and they do this in the name of their Vincentian charism that is recognised by the Church, and also in the name of prophecy. The Church has spoken out very clearly on this point (prophetic witness)... *“It is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God’s Kingdom.”*¹³ As in the time of Saint Vincent and the days of the prophets of the Old and the New Testament, it is always the poor who are exploited, whose human rights are infringed, who are abused by those in power and this should spur us, as Vincentians, to side with the losers. Imagination, creativity and a passion for Christ and for the poor will take care of the rest, namely, looking for appropriate and necessary signs that denounce. Also, we cannot ignore the need to support, encourage and show solidarity with those prophetic voices that can emerge round the life of the local communities and the Province, whether these voices are those of lay people who are particularly concerned for the welfare of the needy, or organisations that aspire to greater social justice. (cf. C.24e). This would be a way of using our charism to advantage.

I would like now to refer to a specific way of proclaiming a message or denouncing an evil. We can do this by living out the vows. *Vita consecrate* refers to this twofold service (proclamation and denunciation) as *“spiritual therapy for humanity.”*¹⁴ In a world dominated by money and self-interest, where wealth and ambition are writing the saddest and most distressing pages of human history, the vow of poverty becomes the means of proclaiming and denouncing. Now that we are living in a world that produces enough food for everyone, could we not moderate our desire for possessions and our need for consumerism so that every person’s basic needs could be met.¹⁵ Living in poverty and ratifying this by vow could show the

¹⁰ Coste *The Great Saint of the Great Century*, Vol II, p.675

¹¹ Cf. L. Abelly *life of the Venerable servant of God, Vincent de Paul*; 3 vol Paris 1664, p. 169-170

¹² Coste III, p. 402

¹³ *Vita consecrate*, 84

¹⁴ *Vita consecrate*, 87

¹⁵ *Vita consecrate*, 89-90

world something of the happiness of sharing, of being in solidarity with the poor and it could also lead to changing social structures that would solve many of our world's problems.

With the vow of obedience we denounce the distorted idea of freedom that can give rise to the worst aberrations. In *Vita Consecrata* 91 we read, “*Who does not see the aberrant consequences of injustice and violence, in the life of individuals and of peoples, to which the distorted use of freedom leads.*” We, on the other hand, are announcing the need to be attentive to the voice of God made manifest through world events, dialogue and discernment (cf. C.31b). Our obedience has something to tell the world about dialogue, about knowing how to listen, about respect for different opinions and cultures, and the need to work together.

With the vow of chastity we denounce the idolatry of pleasure and a hedonistic philosophy, judging these to be no substitute for genuine love. On the contrary, by living the vow of chastity we proclaim that love can transform the wounded heart and cure people of their hurts through solidarity and service.¹⁶ This love has a universal quality but it always starts with loving those who are most in need. Article 29 of the Constitutions expresses this universal love (shown by Daughters of Charity in these terms, “*They embrace chastity as a gift that frees their heart and gives it the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ.*” These words are truly striking. By our vow of service we are denouncing those who treat human beings as a commodity and we stress the dignity of the human person. We proclaim the gospel message of love which shows itself in service.

CONCLUSION

The Company very rightly links prophecy with hope: good prophecy cannot do otherwise than bring hope to people. Paul VI remarked that there are “prophets of doom” but it is not this type of prophecy that the Company is calling us to. All the prophets in the Bible transmitted to the people a message of hope even though the language they sometimes used was very harsh. John the Baptist called his contemporaries a “*brood of vipers*” (Lk 3, 7) but he did this to give them a wake-up call so that they might recognise the Saviour. All the prophets contributed to raising the hopes of the Chosen People, even Jeremiah whose destiny was to live and prophesy in the midst of trials and persecutions.

If prophecy focuses on the “here and now”, hope looks forward to the future. These two calls therefore complement each other as they link the prophetic present with the hopeful future, not forgetting of course, the past which provides the inspiration for both of them. We need to add, also, that prophecy is not just for the present but it will be for the future, too, because the Company cannot disengage itself from this call of the Church which is part of the faith of every Christian and of consecrated life. As we said earlier, prophecy will never be able to dim hope, on the contrary it must foster it. It is important to recognise signs of God in our world and within the Company itself which is full of life and is life-giving to others and gives them hope. It was founded as an example of hope during a time of despair and abandonment for the poor and the marginalised. Throughout history, this is what has

¹⁶ *Vita consecrate*, 88

kept it in existence. To arouse and encourage feelings of hope in those who are without hope is surely a valid way of responding to St. Peter's recommendation, "have your answer ready when people ask you for the reason for the hope that you have." (1P 3, 15).

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNITY SHARING

* The Provincial Assembly is the responsibility of all the Sisters in the Province, the delegates as well as those who take part indirectly. How can we participate in the Provincial Assembly and practise discernment with regard to it if we are not physically present?

* In this talk we have looked at the three dimensions in which we have to live out the Company's call to be prophetic – the spiritual, community and service of the poor aspects. Which of these 3 aspects should have priority in your local community and Province?

*What can you do to make your local community's work or works more prophetic?

Father Javier Alvarez
Director General

SISTER JULMA NEO, GENERAL COUNCILLOR

Forming a Servant of the poor for prophecy

A.. REMEMBERING THE PROPHETS OF OLD

Remembering our prophetic ancestors can render them present to us as "icons" that have a message to share with us and stories to tell us today. This kind of remembering can awaken in us a new awareness which in turn can lead us into untrodden paths that are hope-filled though perhaps not easy to follow.

1. The prophetic task

Two things stand out about the task of the prophets in the Old Testament. First, the prophetic task consisted of three things: proclamation, denunciation and proposing an alternative. The prophets proclaimed God's word on His behalf in concrete historical situations of wars, social injustices, materialism, violence, lawlessness, political unrest, moral decline and change. At the same time they denounced realities in these situations that violated Israel's Covenant relations with Yahweh. The prophets denounced two things in particular: the oppression of the poor

by the rich (Is. 5:8-17, Mic. 3:1-14) and the ritualism in the practice of their religion that was completely opposed to the demands of the Covenant (Is. 1:1-20, Mic.3:9-12, Amos 5:21-26). Seeing their sinfulness and infidelity to the Covenant, the prophets warned the people of impending disasters that would fall on them and which were due to their own making (Is. 10:5-19, 24-27, Hos. 7:8-12)). But even as the prophets rebuked the people for their infidelity to the Covenant, they also reminded them of God's love for them. Convinced of Yahweh's fidelity to His people, the prophets proposed alternatives that would create a new future for God's Chosen People (Amos 5:16-20, 27).

Speaking of the religious life today, John Paul II recalled this three fold dimension of prophecy: "... *they (prophets) proclaim the word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. Prophetic witness... is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom*" (Vita Consecrata 84).

Secondly, the prophetic task was always exercised from a religious motivation¹ based on the prophet's experience of being called by God. **Being called** was the foundational experience for all their prophecy.

Vincent de Paul was a prophet, like other founders and foundresses, even though he probably would never have seen himself in this light. In founding our Company, he initiated a "*new way of being religious women*" that proved prophetic not only for his time but for all ages. Closer to our times, in the 19th century, was another prophet who "prophesied" under conditions similar in some ways to those of Vincent de Paul and to those of the ancient prophets: Sister Rosalie Rendu. She lived through a time of three revolutions, social and political upheavals with their terrible consequences for the life of the Church and society. Like Vincent de Paul, she proclaimed the unfailing love and fidelity of God to the poor of the Mouffetard District by her life and works. She "denounced" the abuse and exploitation of the poor..

2. The Prophet as a person

Prophets are men and women of God: the beginning of their prophetic life was marked by a profound God experience that changed the course of their lives (Amos 7:14-16, Is. 6:1-13, Jer. 28:15-17, Ex.7:1). Their intimacy with God grew over the years. The knowledge they gained from this intimacy enabled them to speak His word with such conviction that those who listened to them knew they were not simply speaking on their own or passively repeating a message they had heard. Moses, the great Prophet, was said to converse with Yahweh "*face to face*" (Ex. 33:11) so often that "*the skin of his face was radiant*" (Ex. 34:29).

The prophets were men and women who lived in close proximity to their people. They loved their people and this love caused them much anguish and distress.

¹ Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure* (Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, NJ 2000) 316-317.

(cf. Kgs. 8:11-12, Hos. 11:1-7, Amos 7:1-6). Their words of proclamation and denunciation were often preceded by lamentation and cries. We recall Vincent de Paul's words: "*The poor are my burden and my sorrow*". Sister Rosalie Rendu knew each of the poor people she and the community served.²

The prophets were men and women of their time. They knew and understood the social, political or religious forces at work in their environment. They were affected by these as much as their people were..

We notice that the prophets of the Old Testament, Vincent de Paul and Sister Rosalie Rendu, came from very diverse backgrounds but they had some common characteristics that we may rightly call "prophetic traits".

a. *Attentiveness*: This is a quality of the heart that disposes us to really see and to truly listen. It involves great sensitivity and a determination to take action. The prophet has to be attentive to what is going on in the lives of the men and women it is his mission to speak to in the name of God. He pays attention to events and is able to see in them signs of what will happen in the future.

b) *Sensitivity*: a quality of heart that implies feeling with and for people.. Sensitivity was said to be Sister Rosalie Rendu's most dominant characteristic, a quality observed in her even as a child.³ Sensitivity makes empathy and solidarity possible.

c) *Contemplation*: Prophets "see" where others only "look". They look and go still further "to see beyond" a meaning that is religious, transcendent. Jeremiah saw an almond tree in blossom and he read in it God's fidelity to His people (Jer. 1:10-19). The prophets looked at events, and "read" a religious meaning into them (cf. 1Kgs. 17:1-24). Contemplation leads a person from looking to seeing, to interpreting, and finally to speaking.

d) *Creativity*: Creativity brings freshness to the prophetic task by proposing new alternatives. Sister Rosalie Rendu's creativity under very difficult circumstances in the Mouffetard district gave birth to new ventures that surprised almost everyone: day care for poor children, technical schools for young girls ("*ouvroirs*"), the "house of charity" and works for the elderly.⁴ Both Vincent de Paul and Sister Rosalie Rendu were particularly creative in bringing together various sectors of society in an impressive collaborative effort to help the poor by sharing their time, talents and money. Their "networks of charity" foreshadowed the "globalisation of solidarity" so often spoken of today.

e) *Courage and audacity*: dispositions of the heart that energise us and give us enthusiasm in committing ourselves to the mission confided to us. Nathan's courage pushed him to reproach David (2 Sam. 12:7). Elijah's audacity engaged him in a "one-man army" fight against Jezebel together with all the royal resources behind her. Courage and audacity accompanied Sister Rosalie Rendu as she climbed barricades in

² Louise Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie Rendu, A Daughter of Charity on Fire with Love for the Poor* (Vincentian Studies Institute, 2006) 91.

³ Op.cit. pp. 12, 38, 188.

⁴ Op. cit. pp. 127-149 for more examples of Sr. Rosalie's creativity and daring.

search of the wounded or she hid fugitives from their enemies. It kept her ministering to cholera victims notwithstanding the threat to her life and to those of her Sisters.⁵

f) Persistence in spite of persecution and trials: The prophets persisted even when they were not listened to (Jer.7: 25-26). Sufferings, rejection, calumny, near death were their common lot. Jeremiah's family plotted to kill him (Jer.12:5-6). Amos was accused of treason by the temple priests (Amos 7: 10-15). Sister Rosalie Rendu was misunderstood by her Superiors and some companions⁶ But none of the contradictions and trials they met succeeded in silencing or stopping the prophets.

g) Truthfulness: Unlike the false prophets who proclaimed what the people or the kings wanted to hear, the true prophets delivered God's word without adulterating it or softening its cutting edge to make it acceptable to their hearers. True prophets are truthful in that their lives are consistent with what they preach and this gives them credibility.

h) Hope: In spite of the difficult message they had to deliver, the prophets never lost hope and their prophetic words always ended on a note of hope. It was hope based not on human optimism but on the certainty that God was faithful to His people. Hosea foretold the day of the Lord when harmony would be restored to creation (Hos. 2:16-25, see also Is. 6: 11-13, 10:20-23). Jeremiah saw the day when the Lord would establish a New Covenant with His People and make all things new again.

B. DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY CALLED TO BE PROPHETS ... TODAY

Four things may be said with regard to our call as Daughters of Charity to be prophets.

1. We are heirs of a double prophetic legacy. We are prophets by virtue of our baptism that incorporated us into the New People of God- a People that is prophetic, priestly and kingly- and by virtue of our consecration we take on the prophetic character of all forms of religious life.

2., Being a prophet is therefore not an option for us. It is an obligation imposed on us by fidelity to our Christian and Vincentian vocation.

3. Prophecy is part of what we are. It is not linked to any role we may have or any particular period of our life. Prophecy affects every aspect of our life.

4. We are called to exercise our prophetic task not simply as individual Sisters but as community and in union with the whole Company. Our local communities, our Provinces, the entire Company are called, like all prophets to live in such a way that we proclaim the Kingdom of God, denouncing those elements in our culture that are an obstacle to the Kingdom and living in a way that shows there is an alternative to what we denounce

C. FORMING DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY AS "PROPHETS"... FOR TODAY AND FOR THE FUTURE

⁵ Op. cit. pp. 149-192.

⁶ Op. cit. p.66

Having reflected on the mission of prophets, we now ask: How do we form Sisters today so that they can be truly prophetic?

1. Deepening our identity as Daughters of Charity

Formation must help Sisters gradually assimilate and continually deepen their identity as Daughters of Charity after having discovered this during initial formation. The development of this identity entails a progressive modelling of ourselves on Christ (C 49). It is principally a process of spiritual transformation, a putting on of the heart and mind of Christ: Adorer of the Father, Servant of His loving plan and Evangeliser of the poor (C8a). Everything else in formation – its content, process, and orientations- must be seen in relation to this.

More specifically, formation for prophecy must aim at helping Sisters to continually live their identity as “*totally given to God for the service of Christ in the poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity while living a life in common for the mission*”. Right from initial formation, it must be clear to the Sisters that henceforth authenticity for them means fidelity to the new identity that they have taken on. They must be convinced that growth in their vocation implies living this identity faithfully, radically and visibly.

a.) Totally given to God (C 7a): The total and radical gift of self to God is a basic element of our identity. In practice this can be weakened by an exaggerated or one-sided stress on service of the poor. The service of Christ in the poor is our aim but the total gift of self is the indispensable prior condition for this. Without it, our service of the poor is not the service of a Daughter of Charity. “*Service is for them the expression of their total gift of self to God*” (C 16b).

Our total gift of self to God proclaims the absoluteness and “*the primacy of God and of eternal life*” (Vita Consecrata 85). At the same time, this total gift of self denounces the temporary nature and superficiality of commitments in today’s world.

Formation at every stage of our life should alert us to certain secular outlooks today that weaken this total gift of self, It must call us call us out of all mediocrity and make us return to the “desert” where the Lord can “speak to our heart” (cf. Hos. 2:16).

b.) For the service of Christ in the poor (C 7a): Our way of serving and relating to the poor, when it reflects our faith vision, cf. C16c, C10b, C24b) is a denunciation of regarding the poor as “objects” in our dominant culture today.

Our service is based on a vision of faith and is motivated by love. (C 7b). It must be for us a form of evangelisation. “*Their primary concern is to make God known to them, to proclaim the Gospel, and to make the Kingdom present*” (C 10a) Being prophetic means not reducing our service to the level of work or action.

Today, this vision of service is weakened by some ways that society interprets it: an exaggerated concern for efficiency, results, remuneration, and competence. To

be prophetic, it is not enough that we work. We need to serve. We are not simply people who work for and among the poor but servants of Christ in the poor.

Formation for service, if it is to be prophetic, must let our “eyes” and our “hearts” see those we serve in Christ, and Christ in them (C 10b) and “to stake everything on charity” (Starting Afresh from Christ 10).

c) .In community (C 7a): The communitarian dimension proclaims that God’s love for us and for the poor is so powerful that it can bring together women of such diverse backgrounds in communion with one another for the sake of the mission. It is a community built on the conviction that we have been called and assembled by God to live together in community. Such a faith community modelled on the Trinity is already a foreshadowing of the realisation of the Kingdom at the end time.

Ours is a world marked by exclusion, intolerance, racism, tribalism, caste systems and generation gaps that divide people. Given such a context, the witness of a community of Sisters from very diverse backgrounds and living in communion and unity is a powerful prophetic proclamation that” *in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, man nor woman for all are one in Christ* (Gal. 3:28). To achieve this, formation must help create a change of mentality or perspective so that we will see diversity as a source of enrichment that is to be appreciated and fostered (C 32a).

d) In humility, simplicity and charity (C 7a): These three virtues that constitute our spirit, effectively denounce certain elements in today’s culture that are not always in line with the gospel. For example, giving too much importance to status, reputation, appearance, excessive seeking after self-fulfilment. These virtues that characterise our spirit proclaim the humility of the God-man who abased Himself for our sake even to the point of dying (Phil: 2:6-8), whose unconditional love for people, especially for the poor and the weak, knew no boundaries (Jn.8:1-11, Lk.7:11 ff., Lk. 19:1ff, Mt.8:5-13) and whose single-minded pursuit of His Father’s will eventually led Him to His death (Jn. 4:34, Lk. 23:46). .Formation must aim at making us true servants whose one Rule of Life is Jesus Christ so (C 8a). that we can be seen as servants “*whatever [our] particular type of work and level of professional competence*” (C 24d).

e) In the Church (C 1a):. Love for the Church entails for us a change of mentality: in the words of Mother Guillemin, we are “*to think first of the Church before thinking of the Community*”. The Community is not outside of or parallel to the Church but very much part of it. This perspective is essential for prophecy. Formation for prophecy must instil in the Sisters a deep sense of belonging to and love for the Church. The local community is a tiny cell in the Church; its life affects that of the Church in some mysterious but very real way. Each decision of an individual Sister, of a local community, Province or of the Company has repercussions for the Church. Formation must make us aware of this ecclesial dimension as something integral to our life (C 52b).

f) In the world (C 12a): The secularity of the DC is one of the prophetic features of the Company that revolutionised religious life for women in the 17th century.. It is striking to note that Constitution 12 speaks not just of proximity to the poor but of living among those we serve. (C12a). This implies genuine insertion,

Fidelity to this secularity means, among other things, continually experiencing a healthy tension between “being in the world” and “not being of it”. Keeping this tension in a creative and dynamic relationship is part of the challenge to us if we are to remain prophetic. Formation must provide us with a spirituality which will allow us to live in the world “without belonging to the world” and develop our powers of discernment.

2. Formation for prophecy must include these essential elements.

a. *Centrality of the God experience:*

An experience of God is the cornerstone of the prophetic vocation. Through our God experiences, God becomes more and more for us a personal reality with whom we relate in a dynamic way. We experience Him as a God who continually calls and to whom we freely respond. Our faith life is this dynamic and continuing relationship with Him. Faith gives us a way of looking at reality according to “the mind of Christ” (Phil. 2:5). Formation must instil in us deep convictions that will gradually transform us to the image and likeness of Christ.⁷ God-experience is a gift of the Spirit that we must welcome.. Formation must create the conditions and the climate that can deepen our faith life.

b) *Contemplation:* Faith grows through contemplation, the capacity “to see God” whether in Scriptures, prayer, events, persons, especially those who are poor, in the Sisters, in the realities of daily life. Contemplation is also the capacity “to listen”; for the God who is “seen” is also a God who speaks, who calls and who awaits a response. As prophets, we need to be able to see and to hear God in ordinary realities that mediate His presence. The fruits of contemplation do not depend on us but on God who reveals Himself when we contemplate Him. But the capacity to contemplate can be developed through formation. Formation must create the conditions that foster contemplation e.g. a love of silence, a balanced life, sobriety, regular prayer, a reflective atmosphere and discipline. Formation should develop in the Sisters attentiveness- the capacity to focus on reality outside oneself. .

c) *Solidarity:* If intimacy with God is necessary to be prophetic, so also are solidarity⁸ (Pius XI: social charity) and proximity to people, especially the poor.(C 10a). Solidarity implies not only sharing “*the joy and hope, the grief and anguish*” (Gaudium et Spes 1) of the people of our age but also “*a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good*” (Solicitudo Rei Socialis 38). In the 2004 Constitutions, solidarity has given a new orientation to some of our “traditional practices” e.g. to our communal penance (S 2) or to our vows (cf. C 30b) with regard to work, S 16a and S 8d in relation to the use of the earth’s resources. See also Action Lines on Mission #5). Solidarity is founded on a faith vision and the conviction that the poor who suffer are “*children of God*”...our “*brothers, our lords and masters*” (C 16c). God calls us to proclaim this vision and to denounce whatever destroys it. Formation must foster in us this solidarity with the poor so that the poor become part of the criteria for important choices that we make. “*How will this choice that I am about to make affect the poor? What are its consequences for them?*” (C24c, C 52b).

⁷ See Guide for Initial Formation, *Key elements of formation*

⁸ Pius XI’s teaching on social charity

d) *Discernment*: We can distinguish between two kinds of discernment: seeking to know God's will with regard to one's vocation (vocational choice discernment) and seeking to know God's will in the events of daily life (evangelical discernment).⁹ Since our world is so full of ambiguities and rapid changes this evangelical discernment is an absolute necessity. Initial formation calls for good vocational discernment and the need to examine candidates' motivations. At all stages formation must help Sisters to develop the capacity and the qualities needed for discernment. Formation in discernment (C56a) presupposes that people will be trained to have critical judgment and an informed conscience (C52b) as well as the capacity to reflect and to be continually deepening their faith life.

e) *Inner freedom*: Authentic prophecy is not possible without a certain degree of inner freedom. This enables us to search for and follow God's Will unencumbered by obstacles coming from ourselves or from others. It takes inner freedom to bear the solitude of heart that is frequently the fate of prophets who are faithful to their mission. It takes a free heart to go against the current, to be counter-cultural. Inner freedom gives prophets the courage to stand by their word even in the midst of persecution. Inner freedom enables us to face calmly the interior and exterior conflicts that are often inevitable when we "announce" and "denounce" in the light of the Gospel or the charism. Formation in inner freedom presupposes a certain degree of human and religious maturity that allows a person to make responsible choices.

Sisters need to know the value principles behind instructions to act in a certain way and to appreciate and interiorise these. Formation must be carried out in a way that allows people to choose values rather than simply follow prescribed ways of acting.

f) *Cultivation of prophetic traits*: The call to prophecy does not destroy the human personality of the prophets but rather transforms it. The young Moses who slew the Egyptian (Ex 2, 12) would become the courageous leader who guided his people across the desert. Sister Rosalie's courage and her willingness to take risks were already evident in her early years.¹⁰ Formation for prophecy asks that we look closely at the personality of the Sisters to discover in them prophetic traits that can be developed; or to help them overcome the obstacles to these prophetic traits. This entails a personalised approach to formation (C 53).¹¹ It also means taking seriously the human formation of the Sisters to see if they have the human foundations needed for being formed as a prophet.

g) *Attention to culture*: In recent years the Church and religious life have been paying more serious attention to culture. Cultures are of capital importance since they transmit values and counter-values. They affect the choices that Sisters make and hence, their lives. Cultures shape our world and it is only gradually that we come to realise this. Today the Church is asking us to help create a "culture of life" to replace a "culture of death" where it exists, a "culture of peace" in place of a "culture of violence". These terms are not simply more jargon but they correspond to a new global awareness of the importance of culture in the construction of a better future for

⁹ Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, *Key elements of formation*

¹⁰ Op. cit. pp26 and 28

¹¹ Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, *Characteristics of Formation*

all. Formation for prophecy must foster awareness and understanding of cultures and its various elements. Hence, formation must equip us with the capacity for discernment to help us make a critical evaluation of the values and counter-values in today's cultures. All these require our Formation Programmes to be inculcated (C 53).

h) Immersion in one's surroundings: With the interest in the "world" generated by the theology of Vatican II, we have grown in the conviction that all realities have to be seen in context if we are to judge them rightly. Formation for prophecy asks that we experience the reality of our people here and now. Moreover, formation at different stages must foster awareness of the signs of the times and the capacity to interpret them together in community.

CONCLUSION

Formation for prophecy implies the need to make various commitments:

-To review our Formation Programmes for the different stages of formation: their content, method and processes, structures and their orientations, to see whether they share the vision for formation presented above.

- To know much better the young women entering our communities today and to invest the necessary time and personnel for this. It is important to reflect with them to see which characteristics of their generation are helps or hindrances to their formation as prophets.

-To reflect more deeply on our cultures to see which cultural elements facilitate or make difficult a prophetic formation. How can we "form" so that the Gospel and the charism rather than the culture become the norm for our choices? How can we form our local communities so they can become more prophetic?

It is to be hoped that our reflection will help us draw up Formation Programmes for the different stages in vocation so that every Daughter of Charity will become more and more "a prophet for our own times."

Sr. Julma Neo,
Daughter of Charity

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

GUIDELINES FOR DISCERNMENT

"From one model of modernity to another"

Notes taken during a talk given by Father Joseph Marie Verlinde at a formation session for the Chapel Ministry Team on "Discernment in welcome."

Born in Belgium on August 5th, 1947, Jacques Verlinde was a doctor of science and a researcher in nuclear chemistry at FNRS¹ when his spiritual quest led him to Transcendental Meditation in 1968. The founding guru of the ashrams of Himilaya took an interest in him and invited him to follow him there, a place rarely accessible to persons from western cultures. In his four years there, he deepened his understanding of Hinduism and its practices. This was also where he had a significant encounter with Jesus Christ, leading him to abandon TM to commit himself to following Christ along the path of the Gospel.

On returning to Europe, this recently converted young man set out to integrate what he had learned in the East with his discovery of the person of Jesus Christ. He was attracted to the interpretations of the Gospels proposed by the esoteric school of thought. Believing that he had found a setting in which to live his Christian faith integrated with his Eastern experience, he attended their gatherings, studied their doctrine, and practised their techniques. Jacques was then invited to develop occult powers which he had as a result of the initiations he had received in India. The purpose was to “make use of them for the good of his neighbour” - at least, that was what was suggested to him.

After several months of practice, he had another disconcerting experience that opened his eyes and made him understand that the path of esotero-occultism is incompatible with that of the Gospel.

This led to another rupture, marking the beginning of a long journey of inner healing. Choosing the vocation of priesthood, Jacques Verlinde spent two years in the seminary in Avignon, then after some time with the Trappists at Our Lady of the Snows, he pursued his philosophy and theology studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. On August 28th, 1983, he was ordained a priest for the diocese of Montpellier. After several months of parish ministry, Bishop L. Boffet, sent him to study and gain a doctorate in philosophy at the Catholic University in Louvain. Today he teaches natural philosophy in the faculty of philosophy at the Catholic University of Lyons and fundamental theology at the Seminary in Ars as well as at STIM (Benedictine Inter-monastic Theology Studies of France).

In 1991, taking the name Joseph-Marie, he pronounced his final vows in the Monastic Brotherhood of the Family of Saint Joseph.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary culture is defined as being “postmodern”. Pilgrims who come to the chapel at rue du Bac belong to our own days, and even if they are not philosophers, they think in terms of postmodernity, due mainly to the influence of the mass media.

A few words about postmodernity

Frederico de Onis² is commonly held to be the father of the term “postmodernity” or “postmodernism”, although the spread of its usage is attributed to the English historian and critic Arnold G. Toynbee.³

¹ The Scientific Research Fund has as its mission the support and development of fundamental scientific research.

² *Anthology of Spanish and Latin American poetry*, Madrid 1934

³ *A Study of History*, Oxford, 1947

It was not until the 1960s that the terms became part of ordinary French vocabulary, due in great part to the influence of the reference work of Jean-Francois Lyotard: *La condition postmoderne* (Paris, 1979).

The expression post-modern (or hypermodern) is defined in relationship to the model of modernity that precedes it. Since its meaning flows from the difference between the two, it is appropriate to say a few words about the modernist model, which developed over time, beginning with Descartes, continuing with Bacon, the Enlightenment and the positivism of Auguste Comte.

FROM MODERNITY TO POST-MODERNITY (OR HYPERMODERNITY)

A) The final years of modernity

Without going into great detail, the history of modernity can be summarised as the advent of the individual and the individual's development into full autonomy.

Modernity was constructed on several major ideas:

- humanism
- reason
- science
- history
- progress.

Drawing support from the Christian tradition, the modernist model joins together several commonly accepted polarities:

- the distinction between good and evil
- knowledge and belief
- masculine and feminine
- real and virtual
- public and private

The advent of the autonomous individual was accompanied by several powerful claims:

- Reason no longer needs the God hypothesis to describe the system of the world (response of Marquis de Laplace to Napoleon.),
- Conscience no longer requires Revelation to discern values and to indicate one's pathway towards a perfect humanity,
- Eschatological hope is no longer the fruit of a transcendent intervention, but is to be expected in view of humanity's progress.

B) The signs pre-figuring the crisis

It is not incorrect to say that the age of modernity entered into a serious state of crisis at the time of the Vietnam War; however, this event was only one of the factors that unleashed a reaction that had been smouldering in the ashes for more than a century.

1 - IN THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD

The heritage of Kant that closed off access to the absolute was found to be less than satisfactory. As a result, romantic philosophy, while integrating the rationalist criticism of Revelation, would reassert the value of intuition, and redefine the phenomenon of religion in terms of feelings about nature.⁴

At the same period, the discovery of sacred writings from the Eastern traditions⁵ would provoke an overwhelming infatuation with the East, which contributed to the foundation of comparative philology⁶ (1786) and the science of religions (M. Muller, 1888).

The utopia of progress leading to an ideal future civilisation changed to an equally utopian quest for the original perfect civilisation, where diverse cultures were merely degraded forms of it.

Scholars at this time were persuaded that the Indies were the birthplace of this original and pure cultural form, and thus an appropriate place from which to draw in order to renew the ageing and even moribund Western culture after so many centuries of Judeo-Christian obscurantism⁷.

We can understand that in this context, the first International Congress of Religions, which took place in Chicago in 1893, had enormous repercussions, and was the starting point for a significant missionary movement towards Eastern traditions, which were already very much present in the West at the time of the events of the 1960s and 1970s.

2 - IN THE SOCIAL WORLD

The intellectual milieu was not the only place to witness this shift. It is important to examine the influence of the great social movements that rose up at the same time against capitalism's exploitation of the working class. The reaction would crystallise around Marxism which was presented as a radical protest of the economic system that came about due to modernism. Objection to the political legitimacy of the bourgeoisie and capitalism would be at the heart of the revolution in the 1970s.

Finally, as well as the economic, social and political structure of modernism, the entire system of values would also be called into question, especially since its morale had been weakened when its Judeo-Christian religious foundations came under attack. Also, sexual liberation would be asserted by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his successors, in particular Wilhem Reich (1897-1957).

A new paradigm

Radical protests against the entire structure would give birth to what is, by common consent, called, "postmodernity". Hierarchical rational understanding within the great temple of universal knowledge was replaced by a fragmentation of different domains which were juxtaposed without comparative evaluation. The great public version of this loose conglomeration would be given the name "New Age".

⁴ Novalis (1772 -1801); Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

⁵ A.Y. Anquetil-Duperron, *Avesta*, (1759), *Upanishad* (1786), Fr. M. Muller, *Rig Veda* (1846)

⁶ Philology is the study of the language of a civilization through analysis of its writings.

⁷ Quinet, *Génie des religions*, (The Genius of Religions) 1824

Absolutely everything rubbed shoulders with the rest on a basis of equality, from the ancestral knowledge of the shamans of Russia or Latin America, to the reinterpretation of quantum physics⁸ in the light of Buddhism, by way of holotropic massages,⁹ ayurvedic medicine,¹⁰ *I-tching*, transpersonal psychology,¹¹ the mystique of numbers, astral voyages,¹² occult powers, channelling,¹³ reiki,¹⁴ bungee jumping,¹⁵ and so many other concepts. The list is far from being exhaustive.

There are common points that justify some degree of relatedness among these sometimes contradictory propositions that are set out on display at the huge new “knowledge” supermarket of confusing new beliefs. These common factors can be summarised in several premises we present in comparison with the modernist model.

Modernity	Post-modernity
A created universe and a theistic concept of God.	A holistic and monistic concept of the universe; an emanative pantheism.
Clear distinction between faith and reason.	Primacy of intuition, individual experience; rejection of dualism of natural and revealed knowledge.
Humanity in a state of becoming, on the path of natural perfection.	Theurgical (magical) anthropology (self-divinisation of the human).
Clear distinction between matter and spirit.	Cosmic and anthropological energetism [doctrine of the 7 “subtle” or “hidden” bodies encompassing the spiritual dimension (spiritualism)].
The myth of progress towards an ideal place or state.	The myth of a return to an original state (traditionalism), reabsorption into non-duality.
A normative moral code founded on a rational concept of God.	Religious syncretism or ethical relativism (amoralism) leading to the establishment of “tolerance” as the highest value.
A realistic and critical epistemology.	Tendency toward idealism to cloud the distinction between real-virtual-imaginary; acriticism.
Exaltation of techno-science to the detriment of the environment.	Return to nature; deep ecology; divinisation of the planet and sacralisation of the forces of nature.

⁸ General term for a collection of theories on physics developed in the twentieth century.

⁹ Messages to promote well-being with the goal of rediscovering one’s full identity.

¹⁰ From Indian tradition *ayurveda* meaning “science of life”, it is decidedly the oldest form of medicine in the world. Treatment is based on diet, massage, yoga, breathing, etc.

¹¹ Transpersonal psychology is concerned with “non-ordinary states” of consciousness: ecstasy, sense of connection with the Universe, clear awareness of one’s profound being, mysticism, etc.

¹² Astral voyage refers to a phenomenon experienced by someone who has the sensation that his or her spirit dissociates from the physical body, and as such, is able to move about separately from the body in time and space, for an indefinite length of time.

¹³ This word means that messages are sent along a spiritual plane to guide humans towards a better life or future. This phenomenon in some aspects resembles the powers of a medium.

¹⁴ Reiki is a method of supernatural magical healing through the use of rites, laying on of hands, etc.

¹⁵ Sport or recreational activity that a person engages in for the purpose of experiencing extreme sensations

A revolutionary transition

More than an evolution, it was a revolution that took place in the eventful years between 1960 and 1970. Without being aware that the changes during these years had been prepared for a long time by the philosophers – denounced as “theorists of reason” at the service of the bourgeoisie – the protesters at that time were only overturning an unstable structure under the pretext of “cultural revolution” [Mao Zedong (1893-1976)] or the revolutionary ideal [Ernesto Guevara (1928-1967), known as “Che”]. The “counter-culture” didn’t invent anything, but rather dealt the death-blow to modernity in order to allow another paradigm, already secretly present, to come to light.

The first fruits were rather disappointing: the “*hippy culture*”, with its preference for psychedelic drugs and vast gatherings en masse (Woodstock, August 1969, that Bruce Cook called the “first Eucharistic congress of the rock religion”) did not leave unforgettable memories. This does not mean that there was a lack reflection: the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) triumphed at the time of massive anti-military reactions (against the Vietnam War in the USA, principally in Berkeley California, and against the war in Algeria: Paris, May 1968). It can even be said that this generation – I was part of it – had a compulsive desire for philosophy, one not always very enlightened, to be sure, or guided rather by a simplistic bias that could already be called “deconstruction”, even if this term came later.

Structuralism would reduce humans to a core of relationships among the elements of the systems in which they participated: the individual emerges from:

- structures coming from the subconscious: Jacques Lacan (1901-1981),
- economic and social structures: Louis Althusser (1918-1990),
- language structures: Emile Benveniste (1902-1976),
- familial structures: Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-present).

The Cartesian foundation of philosophy was also seen in a bad light: thought was perceived as nothing more than:

- the hidden expression of the libido: Sigmund Freud,
- the result of the action of the dominant ideology: Karl Marx (1818-1883),
- the indication of the desire of power seeking to impose itself: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Those digging a grave for God had only to take up their shovels to dig a grave for humanity as well. The logical conclusion to this work of undermining could be none other than an acknowledgment of the absurdity of a life in which all the ideas about meaning are merely products of the same systems, projecting in deceptive ways into a future without any prospects. [Albert Camus (1913-1960) ; Eugène Ionesco (1912-1994) ; Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) ; Bertold Brecht (1898-1956)].

3 – A VAST WORK OF DECONSTRUCTION

A wall that fell, taking with it many utopian ideas

We do not deny, of course, that the years from 1960 to 1980 were already part of post-modernity. To use language borrowed from the non-linear thermodynamics of I. Prigogine, we would say rather, that this was the chaotic phase that preceded the appearance of a new structure after the former one had been dissolved.

The revolutionary ferment of ideas happened precisely with: the liberalisation of the Soviet Union launched in 1985 by Mikhaïl Gorbatchev, and the fall of the Berlin Wall ¹⁶ on November 9th 1989. These events would crush the utopian momentum towards universal communism.

Expressions such as “action”, “commitment”, “struggle” which were at the heart of all the slogans between 1960 and 1980, disappeared as if by magic from political discourse, as they became less and less subversive over the course of the years. The leaders on the barricades quietly integrated into the ranks of this greatly disparaged bourgeoisie, and by a surprising swing of the pendulum, post-modernity settled down into a certain disillusioned inertia.

Disillusioned inertia

Trade-union inertia and a lack of interest in politics were in distinct contrast to the effervescence that had characterised the anarchical years that had preceded this dull period of calm. What happened? Was the deception hiding the reality of the gulag a sufficient explanation of why this happened?

Or should it more radically be said that if we take away humanity’s reason for hope – implying openness to the Transcendent – we condemn humanity sooner or later to immobility? After all, why should one act if everything is absurd? This immobility then leads to narcissistic regression into oneself.

Post-modernity very simply comes as a logical consequence of the doctrines that have brought it about. Individualism is the fruit of a sense of desperation that dares not show itself in broad daylight, but which gives itself away in statistics, such as in numbers of suicides.

The deconstruction of institutions

Not content with inheriting simplistic trends of a structural nature, post-modernity continues its efforts and pushes its work of deconstruction even farther ahead.

According to the American postmodernist, Mark C. Taylor:¹⁷ “*deconstruction is post-modernity elevated to method*”. “*Incredulity with regard to meta-narratives*” [Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998)] extends this scepticism even further: to reason, progress, science, politics, morals. Nothing escapes “deconstruction.”¹⁸ It involves

¹⁶ Constructed in August 1961.

¹⁷ “ *deconstruction is the post-modern raised to the level of method* “

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that the recognised theorists of post-modernity are practically all French, either by birth: Lacan, Foucault, Lyotard, Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Luc Ferry; or because France is their adopted country: Derrida, Kristeva; or because they write in French: Irigaray.

“undoing, decomposing and removing the sediment from” any number of structures: philosophical, political, social, or institutional ones in general.

The deconstruction of language

This term is associated with Jacques Derrida (1930-) who directed his criticism to the communication method *par excellence*: language. According to our author, all language is temporary and relative. Linguistic systems define their own transcendent referents or definitions, in this way he considers them self-generating. So, in the words of E Kant it would be useless, as in “transcendental illusion”, to give objective value to the following referents: humanity, reason, history or God. Language is a game that can be expected to do nothing more than provide communication that remains “intelligible” among members within the same system.

The destruction of the social system

Jean François Lyotard extended these principles to the social system, in order to “prove” that there is no objective “truth”, no Logos that transcends the internal conventions of the system that defines it. Lyotard expresses a fundamental suspicion of the “meta-narratives.”¹⁹ Any assertion of truth is a social product and is only valid within this precise system. “The world is a text.”

Governments, ideas about the world²⁰, technology, history, scientific theories, social customs and religions are all considered social constructions. There is no “transcendent logos”, no objective meaning... We are incarcerated in the “prison of language.”

The destruction of ethics

Michel Foucault continued this work on the level of ethics, deconstructing all norms, especially in the area of sexual behavior. Reference to the so-called natural law, in his opinion, was merely the ideological argument used by those in power.

Every system, every meta-narrative, expresses a desire for power. According to his theory, there are no existing sexual norms, only an unjust imposition of the will of heterosexuals who constitute the majority of the population, on homosexuals who are fewer in number.

This deconstruction has the appearance of being the culmination of the Nietzschean transvaluation of values. According to Foucault, “so-called truth” is simply ideological harassment on the part of those who hold power in society.

A certain feminist movement, represented by Simone de Beauvoir, played an important role in this evolution. Feminism can be viewed from the positive perspective of defending women’s rights; but it can also become a very powerful expression of deconstruction, with its negative side of the annihilation of patriarchy, that is, the dismantling of the family system founded on the authority and

¹⁹ Extensive structured accounts or stories (literary form).

²⁰ “world view”

responsibility of the father to defend, maintain and provide for the well-being of the family, an ancient biblical structure that is at the basis of western civilisation and, in short, of human civilisation. Patriarchy – of biblical origins – is the original sin.

Through these ideas, it is first and foremost the norms of biblical sexual ethics that are targeted and explicitly condemned.

The destruction of theology

The discovery of a Gnostic collection of books and its publication in the 1970s provided a source of pseudo-Christian texts that have allowed a certain number of American Biblicists today to deconstruct the limitations of the orthodox and historical Canon.

In the United States, voices were heard claiming that the most significant contribution of New Testament American science was the admission into the Christian Canon, of the Gnostic gospel of Thomas. Thanks particularly to the Americans, the process has begun to create a new Bible for a new world.

James M. Robinson, a former Protestant pastor, spoke of a new form of Christianity, a combination of orthodoxy and Gnosticism.

The destruction of God

The real essence of postmodern deconstruction is clearly religious. The true target is the Christian perspective of the world.

Mark C. Taylor calls deconstruction “the hermeneutic of the death of God.” In 1974, David Miller announced the accomplishment of the Nietzschean prophecy of the death of God; not the death of gods, but the death of the God of the Bible. He added that, with the death of God, the gods and goddesses of paganism must be reborn. Polytheism would be born with the funeral rites for God. The twenty-first century would be spiritual and even religious, but it would concern another god, the pluri-form and human god of classic paganism.

Here are several examples:

- In the United States in 1993, the Parliament of World Religions gathered together 6000 representatives from 125 religions. The platform included representatives from Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Judaism and liberal Islam, mixed in with Hindu priests, Buddhists, Zen, Jainists, American and African Animists, Sikhs,²¹ Bahaists,²² Zoroastrians,²³ as well as New Age gurus, ecologists, pantheists, theosophes, shamanists, witches and worshippers of the Egyptian goddess Isis, all there to celebrate their deep communion: a syncretic “melting-pot”²⁴ of religions supposed to take into account the religiosity of our planet.

²¹ Monotheistic religion founded in the north of India in the 15th century.

²² Heretical sect founded in 1844 in Iran.

²³ Monotheistic religion founded during the first millennium before Jesus Christ in what is currently western Turkmenistan.

²⁴ Assimilation of differences in order to form one single entity.

- The same year, 2000 Presbyterian and Methodist women gathered to re-imagine the Christian faith. During the three days of their meeting, they never used the name “Father” for God, or “Son” for Christ. They celebrated a eucharist in honour of the goddess Sophia, using milk and honey – they scorned the sacrifice of the cross, considering bread and wine inappropriate – and their worship concluded with the ultimate sacramental act, eating an apple

- Even more pagan is the annual feast of the Burning Man in the desert in Nevada in 1997; 17000 persons gathered to worship Satan. They asked “Papa Satan” to send them with him into hell. The celebrations concluded when a 20-metre high effigy called “Burning Man” was set on fire.

- The current American best-selling fiction book, *Talking to Heaven*, by James Van Praagh, develops topics such as spiritism, occultism and communication with the dead.

Thus, two different but parallel and complementary movements have profoundly changed the so-called “Christian” west. The social revolution of the 1960s has called into question entire areas of our culture, and postmodern analysis has deconstructed many other areas.

A deconstructed society is in a precarious situation; it awaits reconstruction.

4 – THE NEO-PAGAN RECONSTRUCTION

An optimistic eschatology

The void left by deconstruction calls for a new religious plenitude. Polytheism, in particular, is at issue: the gods and goddesses of ancient paganism are doing well on the eve of the third millennium.

Reconstruction likes to see itself as frankly optimistic: Helene Cixous, a spokesperson for the post-modern movement, expresses herself in quasi-religious terms, when speaking about her work. She seeks to construct: “*a portrait of God, that is, a portrait of our own divinity, our own mystery.*” In his work *The Human God or the meaning of life*, Luc Ferry speaks of a “*practical faith*” of a “*secular spirituality*” and of modern hell, “*the solitude of a universe continually devoid of significance*”.

How can we speak of spirituality and of meaning in a “deconstructed” and post-modern world? In spite of all this deconstruction, meaning and spiritual concepts are making a comeback: “*the spiritual aspect of humanism...must undertake a certain reinvestment of vocabulary, a reorganisation of the religious.*” So our author affirms that “*it is in the heart of humanity that the divine must henceforth be situated*”, for “*divinised humanity is eternal.*” Even though this type of discourse takes unawares a secular and officially materialistic society, it risks becoming a new form of ancient Gnosticism.

In search of a foundational myth

Dr. Peter Russell, an expert in transcendental meditation, employed by IBM, Shell, BP, Barclay's Bank, DEC – announced very seriously, through the messages received from a spiritual guide, that a “new vibration is descending on the planet, signalling a moment of rebirth.”

For David Miller, professor of religion at the University of Syracuse, “humanity, set free from monotheistic imperialism, finally has the possibility of discovering new dimensions hidden in the depths of reality.”

The enormous void resulting from radical deconstruction, calls for a new “great story” coming forth from a deconstruction “mystique”, postmodernity, according to David Tracy, professor and progressive Catholic theologian at the University of Chicago, one closely connected with Buddhism and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart.

The Hindu mystic, Swami Vivekananda, prophesied at the first Parliament of World Religions in 1893 the development of a society created from science, western socialism and Indian spirituality.

The triumph of naturalism

This new unity is just as totalitarian as the major accounts deconstructed from the past. What the deconstructionalists would hate is namely that “the hegemony of a single way of thinking and being, of universally valuable belief” would not disappear, as they would hope it would. This hegemony, or dominance, has changed in form. The claim that Christian theism is the truth has now become the claim of pagan monism.

Truth is no longer revealed from outside humanity, but emanates from the human experience, the experience founded on the mysticism of pagan unity with all things. This truth is found not in sacred books but rather in the human soul.

Nothing is new under the sun: Gnosticism has already attacked the Church in the first centuries of our era; but this time, it presents itself with a plan that is as vast as the planet.

The United States is perfecting a new unitary vision to unify the entire world. Four years ago, Mikhail Gorbachev created an organisation called “*The State of the World Forum*”, which brought together in San Francisco hundreds of “luminaries” from all over the world from the realms of politics, science and commerce. His organisation is financially supported by a certain number of the richest business men in the world. Gorbachev wants to save the planet from all its ecological crises – which is entirely valid – and he believes that we only have about thirty years before the planet would otherwise be destroyed.

Since the problem is so enormous, Gorbachev proposes a new system of values, a new “*Ten Commandments*” founded on a syncretic cocktail of social Christianity, Buddhism and western and/or soviet democracy, making use of the common wisdom of all religions throughout the world.

In brief, new paganism has an urgent eschatology and a real religious dimension but one that is profoundly non-Christian. Here, religion and politics are joined in a

concrete and down-to-earth programme on a planetary scale, heavily financed by Americans.

Spirituality of the goddess

Specifically in the United States, this new religious orthodoxy appears in the notion of adoration of the goddess. The rounded belly of the goddess expresses very clearly the unifying and encircling inclusivity of planetary monism. The goddess symbolises the consubstantiality of the human with the divine, an essential concept of paganism, namely, the divinity of all things, all this connected with the explosive agenda of feminism. In this way the expression “return of the goddess” is used, or the entrance into the millennium of *Sophia*, in which all peoples and all religions will be united around the feminine divinity.

5 – NOW IS THE TIME TO RESPOND

To do without God, to be deprived of traditional certitudes, is to be plunged into an undefined and disturbing venture.

It seems that, by natural reflex, individuals and societies have striven to protect themselves by seeking to substitute deposed or declining beliefs with new dogmas and new catechisms from religions lacking transcendence, regrouped under the name “New Age. In *The Temptation of the West*, Andre Malraux has a Chinese person write the following letter to a European friend: “*To destroy God, and after having destroyed God, the European spirit has annihilated all that could be opposed to man: having reached the ends of his efforts, he finds only death. And never before has he made such a disturbing discovery.*”

The French art critic, Michel Seuphor, also lamented the spiritual void that he discerned in the search for something to replace religion. He wrote in “The style and the cry”: “*It seems to me that the basis of the modern tragedy should be sought in the fact that religion has seen its power remarkably diminish even while the need for spiritual refreshment greatly increases due to the faster rhythm of life, intellectual overload, greater numbers of disciplines and responsibilities. Modern man is suffocating himself. The antidote, the indispensable refreshment that is offered to modern man when religion is lacking, is art. This replacement of religion by art is a real and ongoing fact. Who among us has not visited places of prayer in which worship has practically been lost, but which are full of crowds of tourists coming to contemplate a Roman capital or the proportions of a pillar? In the impressive Church of the Madeleine, in Vezelay, I did not see even ten people at Mass on Sunday. But all through the week, the monks of Pierre-qui-Vire, the parish clergy there, were busy from morning to night guiding interminable crowds of tourists through the basilica explaining the meaning of the column capitals, the tympanums adorned with sculptures, even the simplest ornamentations. These crowds of the new faithful, most of whom are not Sunday worshippers, have, however, an insatiable interest in this new genre of Mass.*”

A society cannot subsist without a minimum of “social transcendence.” In reality, this transcendence is no longer assured, either by divinity, or by its values or its understanding of history, which society has successively substituted for it.

The New Age, this mystical-esoteric conglomeration which claims to replace the biblical God, is far from being the best of what we have welcomed into our culture. Without metaphysics' contribution to syncretism, we cannot rebuild hope for the future.

The boundaries between the real and the imaginary are continually being displaced; the separations are now so permeable that the two worlds are no longer truly separated. For example, children write to Mrs. Rowling asking what they need to do to register in Poudlard (Harry Potter's school) and Americans cross the Atlantic Ocean to visit Saint-Sulpice, seeking the evidence that will allow them to solve the secret of the Da Vinci Code (Dan Brown).

It is not too late: it is never too late because God is watching over his children. But God needs you and me to be witnesses of hope. No, the human being is not a "useless passion": to affirm this would be to negate the passion of Christ! Human beings are God's beloved children, created in God's image. God never wearies of calling us, and after we have strayed into the ways of sin, God calls us to return to him along the path of the Gospel.

If our contemporaries do not know about humanity, it is because they have turned their gaze away from the face of Christ, who reveals the truth about God, the truth about humanity, and the truth about the meaning of our life. Called into existence by a God of love, it is in God that we find the fulness of grace in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be all honour and glory for ever and ever.

Father Joseph-Marie Verlinde
Monastic brotherhood of the Family of St. Joseph

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCES

VISIT BY SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General
and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor

Visit to the Province of Central Africa

July 28th - August 5th 2007

On July 28th 2007, the Province of Central Africa had the joy of welcoming Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor, who had come to visit the two countries of this Province: Rwanda and Burundi.

IN RWANDA

On July 29th more than half the Sisters of the Province were present at the Provincial House to share in this great joy, in particular many Sister Servants and young Sisters. The day opened with the Eucharist presided over by Father David, the Regional Superior for the Congregation of the Mission. In the meeting room, words of welcome were followed by a presentation of the Province given by Sister Sabine Iragui, Visitatrice: *“For us, the visit of the Superioress General is a gift from Divine Providence.”* The Province comprises 62 Sisters of 9 nationalities; 41 African Sisters and 21 *Ad gente* missionaries. In her message Sister Evelyne encouraged and challenged us: *“Your life together in community is anchored in Christ and because it transcends the boundaries of all nationalism it is a beautiful example for the whole Company. Each one of you has come to the Company for the service of persons who are poor and this conviction is your strength. You have shown that you are able to persevere by facing so many problems throughout the region of the Great Lakes. Continue to witness to your people that living together is possible despite your differences...The service of poor people is a priority, but be careful that this is balanced by your prayer and your community living.”* Afterwards, a Sister gave a power-point presentation of the houses and services of the Sisters. Sister Evelyne then used power-point to give a presentation on the Company today. The young Sisters expressed their joy through games, songs and regional dances.

The afternoon was dedicated to meeting the Sisters by groups: the Sister Servants, then the young Sisters, then other Sisters. Sister Evelyne invited all the Sisters to strengthen unity of life and subsidiarity, to collaborate in the development of projects and to participate in the coming Assemblies with the same enthusiasm that they showed for the preceding Assemblies. *“If we are free to love, we will give what is most precious to those who are poor”* she said in conclusion.

A long pilgrimage in very little time

In the afternoon of July 30th Sister Evelyne met the Archbishop of Kigali, and on her return, the Provincial Council spoke to her about the realities of the Province. Afterwards, she visited the Community at Nemba and the hospital where the Sisters work. She was very happy to greet the young mothers and admire installations that have recently been put in place.

The following day, Sister Evelyne visited the nursery schools and technical schools in Kicukiro. She was impressed by the joy of the children and young girls which they expressed through the songs and dances of their country. Afterwards, she visited the other works there and admired the devoted service of the Sisters. In the afternoon, Sister Evelyne, Sister Wivine and Sister Sabina visited:

- The social service centre for poor young girls in Nyamirambo. Sister Evelyne encouraged the young girls to become women of hope for tomorrow's world.
- The work for “street children” in which the boys are called “the courageous” and the girls are called “the brave”. There again, the visitors appreciated the services provided and the trades taught at the centre which give young people a new start in life.

On August 1st the three visitors set out to the west to meet the Sisters in the Communities of Musango and Mukungu.

In Musango, they visited the following works: nutrition centre for children, dispensary and health care centre for persons with AIDS

In Mukungu, they visited the following ministries: health centre, nutritional centre, social services, literacy programme and care for persons with AIDS. The Sisters in the Community in Musango joined us for the Eucharist presided over by Abbot Mendiondo, who had asked for the Daughters of Charity to come and begin the mission in Rwanda in the 1970s. The following day, the Eucharistic celebration took place in the parish Church; here the parishioners came to greet Sister Evelyne and Sister Wivine and to thank them for the presence of the Sisters in this very remote area.

On August 2nd they visited two Communities in the South:

- "Divine Providence" in Butare, a place for formation of postulants and various other services for poor persons: education centre for orphans, accompaniment of families of people with AIDS. People who are ill work in an association in order to make a living and to provide mutual support for one other. The participants expressed their appreciation to Sister Evelyne for the generosity of the Sisters. Sister Evelyne, in turn, encouraged them: *"You have given me an important lesson in courage, strength and solidarity. When people become ill, their morale goes right down; but when they come together with others, they encourage one another and everything is different. I promise that I will keep in my heart the memory of your joy, creativity and solidarity."*

- The Saint Elizabeth Orphanage, where the children had been waiting for Sister Evelyne since that morning. Sister Evelyne admired the way this big family lived and the atmosphere of respect and tenderness she found there.

Finally, in the evening, there was a meeting with the postulants who provided the evening's entertainment with national dances. Sister Evelyne told them: *"We are all on the journey of life, but your journey is one that comes before a major decision.. It is very important for your heart to be open so that it may be energised by the light of the Lord. Openness among yourselves and openness towards those who form you is also necessary for your growth. The world today has need of solid Daughters of Charity."*

IN BURUNDI

On August 3rd the visitors arrived in Burundi, and went to the Community of Rwisabi where the Vincentian family warmly welcomed them. After sharing a meal together, they visited the Vincentian community and works for the poor: health centre, nutritional centre and social services centre. In her meeting with the Sisters in the local community, Sister Evelyne stressed the importance of collaboration with the Vincentian family and the promotion of poor people.

The schedule indicated: "Visit to Ruzo...if possible". Well, nothing is impossible for God. On August 4th the Community of Ruzo in Burundi had the great joy of welcoming Sister Evelyne and Sister Wivine. After warm greetings, the children in the nursery school also welcomed the guests. Although it was holiday time, they came for this beautiful occasion, enlivening the celebration with their songs and regional dances. Afterwards, the members of the Marian Youth Group expressed

their joy and gratitude for this visit. Sister Evelyne promised to pray for all of them in the Chapel in the Motherhouse. Then followed a visit to the crafts centre. Sister Evelyne was surprised by the small number of pupils, the high level of illiteracy and the progress made in this field as each student received personal follow-up care. Afterwards, they visited the health centre, the surrounding area and above all, the hospitalised patients who were comforted by a smile and personal attention from Sister Evelyne. On the way back, they made a brief visit to the parish church.

After the meal, there was a community gathering where we discussed certain problems with regard to people who are most in need. The problems are overwhelming, truly for each one of us “our burden and our sorrow.” Sister Evelyne listened to us attentively, sharing our concerns.

Sister Evelyne arrived in Bujumbura, a recently established community, on August 5th. She met the members of the local community, emphasising how important it is for the Sister Servant to be the spiritual animator of the community.

At the end of the visit, Sister Sabina, the Visitatrice, expressed to Sister Evelyne the appreciation shared by all the Sisters of the Province. It was now time to depart.

This rapid and very intensive visit by Sister Evelyne helped us to grow in our awareness of belonging to the Company. She has been for us an example of the spirit of our vocation - humility, simplicity and charity, and we give thanks to the Lord for such great generosity. We assure her of our prayers.

Sisters from the Province of Central Africa

SPECIAL BEATIFICATION

Sister Marta Wiecka

Beatified May 24th 2008

In Ukraine, in the cemetery in Sniatyn, many believers are attracted to a tomb that is always decorated with flowers, candles and embroidered cloths as is traditional in this country. People of Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and other faiths all truly believe that the Sister who has been buried there for one hundred years is a saint. They call her Matuska “Loving Mother” and come to confide their daily problems to her, convinced that she will take care of them from heaven just as she did when she lived among them on earth.

WHO IS MATUSKA?

Sister Marta Wiecka was born on January 12th 1874 in Nowy Wiec, Poland into a large and very devout Catholic family. Marta was the third of thirteen children. She was baptised on January 18th 1874 in the parish church in Szczodrowo, receiving the name Marta Anna. Each day the family prayed together and read the Word of God. The family home was open to everyone, a place where all could find renewed strength for their faith and their patriotism. When Sister Marta made her First Communion on October 3rd 1886, at the age of twelve, she was already quite mature for her age. In school, she had a very positive influence on her companions and this was shown by her words and more particularly by her example.

At the age of fifteen, her future became clear: she felt a call from God. She wrote to Father Dabrowski, her spiritual director, and then to the Daughters of Charity in Chelmno to ask to be admitted into the Company. As a result, she was invited to spend Christmas with the Sisters. With her parents' consent and a great sense of joy, she celebrated Christmas 1890 with the community of the Sisters in Chelmno. When she returned home she said rather sadly, *"I really would have liked to stay with them, but I am too young and the Visitatrice asked me to wait two more years."*

Several months before making the decision to enter the Company, Marta learned that her friend Monica Gdaniec wanted to follow the same path. However, due to the political situation, Monica could not be received in Chelmno, so the Visitatrice suggested that she join the Daughters of Charity in the Province of Krakow. So it came about that Marta and Monica both went to Krakow to prepare to become Daughters of Charity.

After four months of Postulancy and nine months of Seminary, Sister Marta was sent on mission to serve the poor. In 1893, she arrived at the Hospital in Lvov. With her Sisters, she learned to care for those who were ill and also to be attentive to their spiritual needs.

In 1894, Sister Marta began working in the general hospital in Podhajce. In this community she prepared to make her vows, pronouncing them for the first time on August 15th 1897.

PHOTO

In 1899, Sister Marta was sent to the hospital in Bochnia. Here she experienced a period of trial and suffering. A sick man, a watchmaker who had a bad reputation, told lies about her. In the room with him was another patient, a future seminarian. Sister Marta was very attentive in her care of him, and this made the watchmaker jealous. When he left the hospital, he went to the pastor to accuse Sister Marta of faults against chastity. The priest believed the accuser and notified the Provincial Director and the Visitatrice, who believed what the pastor said. The only one who was convinced that Sister Marta was innocent was her Sister Servant, Sister Maria Chabbo. She arranged for Sister Marta to remain at Bochnia, certain that the lie would be eventually discovered. The slanderer found out about this and began to persecute the Sister Servant in revenge, trying to kill her on Holy Thursday in 1901.

This threat made the pastor reconsider and led him to find out the truth: Sister Marta was innocent.

That same year, Sister Marta suffered another trial in the death of her brother Franciszeck. During a visit by another one of her brothers, Jan, a deacon, she confided to him that she had seen a shining cross and heard Christ say to her: “My daughter, bear your sufferings with patience and serve those in your care. I will soon call you home to heaven. Your brother Franciszeck is already here.”

In 1902, Sister Marta arrived at the Hospital in Sniatyn to care for those who were ill, but her service was not limited to those in the hospital. She offered her experience and her faith for the benefit of all. With cheerfulness, kindness and patience, she cared for all those who were in physical and spiritual need.

Sister Marta’s life was made up of acts of loving kindness and it ended in the same way. Her boundless charity led her – fully aware of the danger involved – to take the place of a young employee, the father of a family, who had been asked to disinfect the hospital room of a patient with typhus. The following day, the first symptoms of the disease manifested themselves in Sister Marta. Every effort was made to save her life. During the last day of her life in the hospital, the faithful from different religions prayed to God that she would be cured.

On May 30th 1904, after receiving Communion, Sister Marta entered into a state of deep prayer, as if she was in ecstasy, and then peacefully died.

Sister Marta Wiecka will be beatified on May 24th 2008 in Lvov, Ukraine.

TESTIMONY GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Irish Province

Opening of a Seminary in Kenya

A bit of history

In January 2002, the Daughters of Charity opened two houses in Kenya: one at Chepnyal and another at Thigio. A third house was opened in September 2004 in the region of Nairobi: Chanzo was to become the main house and be the centre for administrative services. Responsibility for the mission in Kenya lies with the Irish Province which works in close collaboration with the 5 Provinces of the United States, Australia, Great Britain and the African provinces of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Nigeria. In January 2008, this mission had the grace of seeing 4 young Kenyan women become Daughters of Charity.

18th January 2008, Opening of the Seminary in Chanzo

All was peaceful on the morning of January 18th 2008 in the chapel at Chanzo, Nairobi, the main house of the Daughters of Charity in Kenya, as the first four

Kenyan postulants were incorporated into the community as members of the Daughters of Charity. Outside, there was an uneasy quiet on this, the third week of the political unrest and rallies--- rallies which had already cost many lives and caused much violence and thousands of displaced people. In this context, the hope and joy of the Seminary Sisters and of the Community gathered for the occasion, were a real sign of harmony, peace and of God's presence among us.

Sr. Catherine Mulligan, Coordinator of the Kenyan Mission, welcomed Sr. Catherine Prendergast, Visitatrice of Ireland, and all the Sisters assembled for the opening of St. Catherine's Seminary, saying "*it is a very special day for Sr. Margaret Mary [Seminary Directress] and for Lawrencilla, Josephine, Rosemary and Lucia. The Seminary opens with you today. You are the first Seminary Sisters in Kenya, which is a blessing, a grace, and a responsibility.*"

Sr. Catherine Prendergast also encouraged the four Seminary Sisters as she presented them with the Constitutions and Statutes. She and Sr. Margaret Mary Ekanem witnessed the signing of the Incorporation Document. The sense of joy was palpable and this was seen most particularly in the liturgy.

Commenting on the remarkable growth of the community since the arrival of the Sisters in Thigio and Chepnyal in 2002, Sr. Catherine Mulligan expressed the hope "*that this small seed planted today...will become in time that great tree where the poor and needy of Kenya will find shelter.... We pray for each other and for the mission confided to us, and we entrust the future to God's providential care and to Our Blessed Mother's protection.*" As if in answer to this prayer, later that morning, six men came from Mombasa, carrying a crate with the statue of Mary, Our Lady of the Globe. Shipped from the Provincial House of the British Province over three months earlier, this statue of Mary had been in the Seminary in Mill Hill for many years before its journey to Kenya.

All 15 missionary Sisters and the three postulants were at the celebration. In addition, Sisters from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Congo, Tanzania and Madagascar, who are here studying English or attending courses at Tangaza College, added to the joy of the Seminary Opening.

Letters and emails came from our Superiors General, Fr. Gregory Gay and Sr. Evelyne Franc as well as from Sr. Margaret Barrett and other members of the General Council, and many emails and cards were sent by the Visitatrices and Sisters of all the participating provinces, all offering encouragement, support and prayer.

For Fr. Barry Moriarty, C.M., celebrant of the Mass, the opening of the Seminary had special significance; it was he who made the request to our Superiors General, in 2000, for the Daughters to come to Kenya. There is a deep sense of God's Providence at work in all the developments that have taken place since then. The opening of the Seminary is a particularly significant milestone on the road, a call to further inculturate the Vincentian charism in the rich soil of Kenya and to work for the growth of the little Company in East Africa. In the midst of the darkness that envelops Kenya at this time God's light shines.

We go forward in hope, trusting that the Lord “has plans for us, plans that speak of peace and not disaster.” and we confide our future to Mary, Mother of the Company.

Sr. Catherine Madigan
Daughter of Charity

TESTIMONY GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Province of Peru

150th anniversary of the arrival of the Vincentian charism in Peru

“Let us give thanks to God and the Blessed Virgin, for the light of love shining on those who are poor, through the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise which continues to live among us in Peru.” This is the refrain of the hymn sung by the members of the Vincentian family expressing our gratitude to Divine Providence for the gift of serving God for 150 years in his suffering members in Peru.

A BIT OF HISTORY

In reflecting on this journey of one and a half centuries of the mission of charity, we present some of the most significant aspects of our history:

Arrangements for the arrival of the Daughters of Charity

Virginia Carassa Mena, a young woman who came from a wealthy family in Lima, learned about the works of the Daughters of Charity in France and in other countries. Having decided to follow Jesus Christ in this way of life, she asked her father, Don Francisco Carassa, a member of the Division of Public Charity in Lima, to allow her to go to Paris to enter the Company. Since he loved his daughter very much, he did not want her to leave. Instead, he made use of his social, political and religious connections to bring the Daughters of Charity to Peru. The arrangements were made through the President of the government, Marshal Ramon Castilla and the Archbishop of Lima. The process took about two years. There was also a request for Vincentian Priests to come, as they were well known for their good service in the Church: their organisation and formation of young men in the diocesan seminaries, and their work of evangelisation through popular missions. A contract was signed in Paris on May 9th, 1857 by Don Francisco de Rivero, the ambassador of Peru, Father Jean Baptiste Etienne, the Superior General, Sister Montcellet, the Superioress General, the Assistant General and two General Councillors.

February 2nd 1858: Arrival of the first Daughters of Charity

After a long sea voyage that lasted 5 months, aboard a ship coincidentally called the “Saint Vincent de Paul”, they reached the port of El Callao on February 2nd 1858, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The travellers included 2 Priests of the Mission, a Vincentian Brother, and 45 Daughters of Charity. Their arrival became a religious and social event. The Sisters set out for their missions: 3 hospitals and a

home for abandoned children. In the Provincial House a formation centre was opened for Virginia Carassa who became the first Peruvian Daughter of Charity. She was followed by many others. The works of charity quickly developed: day schools, boarding schools, orphanages, nurseries, homes for elderly persons, sanatoria, health care centres, home visiting, etc. The Sisters were also responsible for the school of nursing in Peru. Later, the Sisters were asked to take charge of works in the interior of the country : Arequipa (1871), Tacna (1874), Trujillo (1875), Puno (1876) and Cajamarca (1876). In 1883, they set out for a mission in Bolivia and then to Tarma and Jauja in Peru. At present the Province comprises 25 local communities located in 15 regions.

The first group of “Children of Mary” was founded in 1866. The foundation of the “Ladies of Charity” dates back to 1900. With the help of new members, the Vincentian priests became responsible for the Seminaries in Cuzco, Arequipa, Trujillo, Cajamarca and Puno. It quickly became obvious that more Vincentians were needed, and others arrived from the Province of Barcelona. In this way, the charity of Christ extended to other regions and the outlying areas of Lima. Some Peruvian Sisters are currently part of the mission *Ad gentes* in Africa and Turkey.

August 15th 2007: Earthquake

In the middle of preparations for the 150th anniversary of the Province, our country as well as our Vincentian family was put to the test by an earthquake that occurred on August 15th 2007. The epicentre was located in Pisco, a city that was almost completely destroyed, including a church that crumbled to the ground while Mass was being celebrated. About one hundred people lost their lives, including two Daughters of Charity. The celebrant of the Mass, a Vincentian priest, miraculously escaped unharmed. Thanks to the prayers, solidarity and concern of all the Company, we were able, without forgetting this painful event, to nonetheless continue to prepare for the celebration of 150 years presence of the Daughters of Charity in Peru.

FEBRUARY 9TH 2008: CELEBRATION OF THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROVINCE

On February 7th 2008, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, arrived with Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor, to celebrate our anniversary with us and to visit the Province.

On February 8th there was a meeting with the Provincial Council, several visits and an evening of entertainment.

In the morning of February 9th Father Gregory Gay, Superior General, led a prayer service for all those who had devoted their lives to the service of Christ in poor persons. That afternoon, at the Cathedral in Lima, a solemn Mass was celebrated in thanksgiving for the 150 years that have passed since the arrival of the Vincentian charism in Peru. Archbishop Cipriani Thorne of Lima presided at the liturgy, with concelebrants Bishop Rino Passigato, the Apostolic Nuncio, Father Gregory Gay, other Vincentians, bishops and priest friends. Members of the various branches of the Vincentian family were also present. The evening ended with an artistic prayer vigil.

February 10th was set aside for a visit to Pisco the city that had been destroyed, where our visitors would meet the Vincentian priests, Sisters and the people who had suffered.

On February 11th Sister Evelyne met the Sister Servants, the Sisters responsible for the various stages of formation, the young Sisters and the elderly Sisters in the infirmary. At the Eucharist presided over by Father Gregory, a large number of representatives of the branches of the Vincentian family were present.

The following day, Sister Evelyne and Sister Blanca Libia left for a brief visit to Bolivia. From there, Sister Blanca Libia continued on to Chile while Sister Evelyne returned to Peru with the Visitatrice of Bolivia, where they met up with the Visitatrice of Ecuador and the Provincial Assistant. In this way, the three Provinces met together at the Provincial House, which had been beautifully decorated with lovely sprays of flowers given as gifts by various religious and Church representatives.

The time for departures arrived. Sister Evelyne departed, leaving us with memories of goodness, simplicity, joy and peace. Greatly encouraged and comforted, we extended to her much gratitude and a fond farewell. The following day, we also expressed our appreciation to Father Gregory for his cordial and caring presence among us.

United by the same ideals, we are very happy to be able to continue to serve Christ in persons who are poor, in collaboration with other congregations and lay movements which have been inspired by the Vincentian charism. We give thanks to the Lord and the Immaculate Virgin Mary for their loving presence throughout these 150 years. May they continue to accompany us on the pathway of our mission as “prophets and bearers of hope” for those most in need.

Sister Mery SANJINEZ BAUTISTA
Daughter of Charity

Sisters' Testimonies

Province of Switzerland-Turkey

30th European Meeting of Young Adults in Geneva
animated by the Taizé Community

The Pilgrimage of Trust

From Friday, December 28th 2007 to Tuesday, January 1st 2008, the city of Geneva and the towns in the region of Lake Lemman were transformed by the festive and radiant presence of some 40,000 young people (30,000 of whom were foreigners) who in a spirit of trust had made this journey. Countless testimonies show that the

local inhabitants were greatly impressed by the sense of peace flowing from this large crowd on the move.

This gathering required the help of many persons who opened their homes to provide accommodation for these young people. With extraordinary generosity, the parishes in the districts of Geneva and Vaud organised the meetings and morning prayers. The commitment of the vast number of persons involved in making this adventure a reality was a source of joy and hope.

On December 28th hundreds of buses arrived in Geneva carrying tens of thousands of young people from Eastern and Western Europe. They arrived with smiles on their faces, without a trace of fatigue, despite the fact that some had journeyed for several days. The joy of being alive shone on their faces. Large pavilions in the Palexpo (the exhibition centre) hosted them each day for times of prayer, reflection and meals.

For four days, young people from all over the continent were able to share in the experience of the presence of God during times of prayer as well as during meetings and sharing, thanks to the exceptional organisation provided by the Brothers of Taizé (who had come to Geneva three months prior to the gathering).

The great richness of this gathering was experienced in the Palexpo, in the parishes and in the families where the young people stayed; there was a sense of revitalising goodness pervading our materialistic society. 160 young people from our parish in Morges took part in the event. The positive attitudes, patience and attention paid to each one encouraged exchange and mutual understanding, despite language difficulties. There was a real current of friendship circulating among them all...

Many of the host families accompanied the young people during the times of prayer in the parishes as well as at the Palexpo. They were impressed by the young people's kindness, good manners and conduct, and the wholehearted way they entered into the proceedings despite all that they had had to face in taking part in this "pilgrimage of trust". An elderly and childless couple hosted three of the youngsters. Although they had no common language they communicated by smiles and gestures in a way that demonstrated real affection. This couple cried when the young people left; they had been good guests, even though one of them was ill. Another family had cancelled their plans for January 1st in order to remain with the young people until the end of the gathering. In our local community, we welcomed three young Polish women, who gave us a lovely book written in French about their city.

Each morning, the young people gathered for a time of common prayer in the parishes, and then groups met in 160 different locations throughout the city for times of sharing. At midday and in the evening, they came together in the Palexpo for a time of prayer together.

On December 31st, the last day of the gathering, after a period of prayer together at the Palexpo, the participants met in the parishes at 11:00 p.m. for a **prayer vigil for peace**, in solidarity with sufferings peoples throughout the world, followed by a "**celebration of humanity**".

Before they left on January 1st, the young people invited their hosts to come and visit them in their countries, giving them their addresses in order to keep in touch with them. They will not forget the words of Brother Alois: *“Let us no longer waste so much energy on the differences among Christians...Let us come together more often in the presence of God, listening to the Word, in silence and praise. Once a month or every three months let us invite the people in our towns, villages or regions to a ‘vigil for reconciliation’.”*

When we returned to our community in Morges, we asked ourselves the following two questions:

What can we do to keep alive the memory of all that we have received?

What sort of follow-up should take place in our personal lives and in our parish life as a result of this pilgrimage of trust?

Today, our hearts are overflowing with a great sense of gratitude to God!

Sister Catherine and Sister Emmanuelle
Daughters of Charity

TESTIMONY FROM A SISTER INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GATHERING AS PART OF THE HEALTH CARE TEAM

Please allow me to share with you the incredible experience I had among thousands of young and not so young persons.

Before this gathering of young adults from Taizé in Geneva, Sister Marie-Bernard Giffard, General Councillor, notified me about a request from the Taizé Community for a Sister from the Province of Switzerland to help out during the gathering. As the Visitatrice, my first response was to decline, as we no longer have any Sisters actively involved in nursing care. However, I hadn't taken into account the challenge from one of the Sisters in our community, who said to me: “Why don't you do it?” And so I set out on this wonderful adventure. On D-day, I met the group of doctors and nurses of various nationalities. We formed two teams that worked in shifts from 10:00 a.m to 10:00 p.m. We set up our service in an area provided for us in the Palexpo. Each day, a steady stream of young people would pass through the infirmary, seeking health care, medications, a listening ear, comfort, etc. I was amazed at the commitment shown by these professionals. They all had an earlier experience at Taizé which had left an impact on their lives, and they were pleased to share some of their time and skills. We collaborated well with the nurses in the Palexpo, who were very impressed by the peaceful and joyful spirit of these days. This was a change from other more mundane exhibitions.

The prayer times at noon and in the evening were held in an impressive atmosphere of recollection. Each day, Brother Alois, the successor of Brother Roger, addressed the young people with simple messages that called them to reconciliation and peace: *“We draw from the living God the energy we need in our struggle for reconciliation. Without an interior life, we could not fully carry out our resolve. In God we find joy; we find hope for a life lived to the full...We cannot hold the fire of*

reconciliation in. It sheds light on a road where we are led to be peacemakers both close at hand and far away.” (From a letter entitled “Letter from Cochabamba” because it was written in Bolivia during a recent gathering of Latin-American youth.)

The principal Christian Churches in Geneva and the surrounding regions called this European Meeting of Young Adults from Taizé “an exceptional gathering”. What took place in Geneva and in the parishes that welcomed the participants, was, according to the churches’ accounts, “*A new phase on the journey toward unity of Christians and peace among peoples...the city of Geneva, the cities and towns in the region of Lake Lemman were transformed by the festive and radiant presence of some 40,000 young adults who, in a spirit of trust, took part in this event.*”

These young people, communicating joy and praying together, posed no security threat (I did not see a single police officer during these days), so much so “*the residents of the city were impressed by the peace flowing from these crowds on the move.*” Is there not an important message in this? As a Carmelite once wrote: “*Hope is sitting at the window. Do you not see it?*”

I am very grateful for this experience that given new flight to the wings of Hope dwelling in the hearts of the participants and the whole Church in the region of Lake Lemman.

Sister Madeleine SAILLARD
Visitatrice

History of the Company

SPECIAL CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF MOTHER GUILLEMIN

Mother Suzanne Guillemin

1906 – 1968

Daughter of Charity – Daughter of the Church
Superioress General of the Company

VIII – THE POST-CONCILIAR PERIOD CONTINUED

MOTHER GUILLEMIN IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH

1 – FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORESSES GENERAL (UISG): MARCH 1967

Mother Guillemin writes about this first General Assembly in the Echo of the Motherhouse for the month of May 1967, after her return from Rome. The importance of these conferences made her want to share with all the Sisters her joy and enthusiasm for all that she had learned about the aggiornamento of the Company. *“The International Union of Superiores General held its first Assembly in Rome, from March 1st-12th 1967, gathering together 95 Superiores coming from every part of the world, and representing every form of active religious life. The Little Company was present in the person of its Sister Servant who makes it a duty and a pleasure to share with all her Daughters the graces and riches received during these days of work and prayer.”* (Echo, p.180)

ORGANISATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

This first General Assembly of the UISG was preceded by 12 months of preparation. An extensive survey was sent out to the 2200 Superiores General in the world. The questionnaire included the following points:

- What are your expectations of UISG?
- What topics would you like to see studied at the Assembly: formation of members, adaptations to the needs of the times, modern ways of witnessing to religious life, exchanges and cooperation among congregations.

In December 1966, the responses were synthesised in the points of the Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* which would be studied at the Assembly.

To ensure the success of this first Assembly, the Superiores General in Rome actively collaborated in its material preparation. Mother Guillemin offered Casa Maria Immacolata at Via Ezio for the entirety of this long session that took place from May 1st-12th1967. The participants, 20 members of the General Council named beforehand by the Sacred Congregation of Religious, and 80 delegates from various countries, assisted by several interpreters, would reflect on the aggiornamento of religious formation and seek to develop new guidelines.

Mother Guillemin was the coordinator of a work group for French-speaking participants. All the questions addressed or raised during the session were reviewed one by one by the coordination committee.

THE ASSEMBLY PROCESS

Opening

The evening before the Assembly opened, the “Information Office” provided all the necessary information in various languages. A press service was organised in the hallways, providing a variety of books in different languages.

The Mother General who was the President opened this first General Assembly of the International Union of Superioresses General, emphasising the purpose of the Union, as stated in the statute: sisterly and effective collaboration of Superioresses General throughout the entire Church, for the purpose of sharing their experiences, studying current problems of religious life, and generously cooperating with other Institutes to carry out common goals. She reminded them that the statutes of UISG made it clear that the General Assembly is the **principal and indispensable work** of the Union. The President said: *“We are not here to maintain our particular points of view, but to seek the common perspectives of the Church, with a view to orienting our religious life.”*

***PHOTO ACROSS 2 PAGES

Discourse by Bishop Philippe

The address given by Bishop Philippe, OP, paved the way for the special General Chapter something expressly desired by the Church. He first called to mind the development of the International Union of Superioresses General by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Religious on December 8th 1965, the same day that the Council ended, and by the nomination of the provisional General Council. He then spoke directly on the subject:

“A General Chapter must be organised on the human scale...according to the Institute’s size...You will bring to it the problems and the desires of your respective countries, but the focal point will be the idea of collaboration in the common task of renewing religious life in the whole Church. Your first concern will not be the problems facing your country... but with your personal experience, you will address the problems that are common to all religious throughout the entire world...”

*...The third aspect of the theme concerns **norms for the application of the decree Ad gentes**, the life of the missions. This will focus on the major directives for missionary Institutes and international Institutes having houses in mission countries...”*

Bishop Philippe emphasised another important part of the decree: the question of dependence on the bishops with regard to the apostolates of religious in the dioceses, as well as the recommendation to the bishops that they respect the demands of religious life and the particular purposes of the Institutes.

He pointed out that the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* must be taken into account each time the Motu Proprio proposes that a study be carried out.

He specified the work method: *“it is important for you to speak out because the success of this Assembly is in your hands.... Language experts are available to you. Do not expect, however, that these experts or I, myself, will have ready-made solutions. It is you who must draw conclusions and carry out specific ‘vota.’”* He added a note of caution: *“I clearly said ‘conclusion’ and ‘vota’, not ‘decisions’.* *Contrary to what happens at General Chapters, this Assembly cannot and must not make decisions that will oblige the Superioresses General to apply them in their own*

Institutes. The UISG is at the service of the Superioresses General to help them to exercise their responsibilities, but it has no juridical authority over them. When you return to your community, you remain free to decide whether or not to apply the 'vota' of the Assembly."

He concluded by saying: *"The conclusions drawn at this Assembly are collegial acts, while the interventions of each Superioress and even the conferences that several of you will give to the Assembly, only apply to those giving them...this is the condition sine qua non for freedom of discussion which must be the golden rule of this Assembly, as is true for every General Chapter. When you return home from a Chapter, discretion demands **that interventions from any person participating in the Chapter are not shared with other Sisters.** It is only the Official Minutes that express the collegial thought of the Chapter."*

WORK OF THE ASSEMBLY

The central theme of the General Assembly was focused on the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*. This text became familiar to the Company through the Echoes and the work of the Assembly. The interventions which were very few in number at the UISG Assembly, gave the participants the clarification they needed concerning the renewal process. Here are some of the major ideas from Vatican II in relation to religious life

The themes studied were: revision of the Constitutions, government, prayer life, poverty, community life, formation and the insertion of religious life in the Church and in the world.

Religious life inserted in the Church and in the world

A note in the UISG bulletin about this Assembly gives this introduction to the subject: "With regard to this important question, special reference should be made to the study done by Rev. Mother Suzanne Guillemain, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity. The subject is dealt with in two parts:

- The spirit in which research into insertion should be made
- Problems of living this insertion.

In the first section, spirit, doctrine, ministry and inner renewal are addressed at some length. Problems relating to life are connected with traditional situations and the creation of new forms of insertion within structures

I

The conference is solid and practical, given Mother Guillemain's wide experience of observing a changing world, works that are not developing, obstacles that society and the Church have to face. She constantly meditated on all this. She had had the opportunity to speak to the Bishops during the Council, and was asked to give her ideas in more detail during the study of the document *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. One year after her death, the UISG's first quarterly Bulletin of 1969 came back to this conference, as a way of emphasising the need for renewal: "The essential aspect of adapting our Institutes and their insertion into the present context, as well as the need to carry this out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were all stressed at the first General Assembly of UISG by the late Mother Guillemain. We have not yet finished *reaping the spiritual benefits* of her work."

PHOTO

As Mother Guillemin said in her text: *“The insertion of religious life into the Church, and in the Church’s name, into the world, is nothing other than the living accomplishment of the pastoral goal of the work of the Council...Every effort at insertion that envisages reforms or new structures other than those related to the spirit that must animate them, are doomed in advance to failure and there will be long periods of trial and error, and wrong moves until they come to be in accordance with the movements of the Spirit...”*¹

THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH DURING THE ASSEMBLY

Pope Paul VI himself gave a presentation at the Assembly. His discourse was considered among the most note-worthy that he had ever given on the life of women religious, with its vision of what is most essential to it: “The religious significance of our consecrated lives.”

Cardinal Antoniutti, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, spoke with authority as he gave the final instructions. The first part affirmed the urgent need for this International Union of Superioresses General. The second part shed light on the principal sources of religious renewal: the Gospel, fidelity to the Founders and an ecclesial spirit. There was a strong reminder of the priority of spiritual values: *“Take great care to ensure that the members of your Institutes follow the clear teachings of the Council with fidelity, conviction and enthusiasm, and develop a keen awareness of the love that consecrates them to God...”*

This impressive discourse was preceded by an intervention by the Cardinal Prefect of the “Propagation of the Faith” which marked a very significant turn in missionary methodology: *“Religious missionaries are missionaries in the strict sense of the word; they must insert themselves as much as possible in the apostolate. This is where their vocation places them and calls them to be, for the Holy Spirit has chosen them and set them apart for the mission of evangelisation and the implantation of new particular Church communities...”*

The election of members of the General Council was needed to ensure an international presence of Religious. Mother Guillemin was elected Councillor of UISG. She returned to Paris, ready to lead her spiritual family along the path of renewal that the Church was calling for, a concept that she had been familiar with for years.

2 - IN FRANCE

Having been an Auditrice at the Council, Mother Guillemin was invited to give presentations at numerous gatherings of priests, religious and the laity. In addition, she actively participated in the National Unions of Religious, where she explained most particularly the changes needed for religious life.

¹ The complete text of Mother Guillemin is included as an appendix.

PARIS: AT THE CONGRESS OF UNCAHS

On June 21st, 1966, Mother Guillemin gave a masterly presentation of her views to the religious gathered for the Congress as she spoke on: “**Religious in hospital and social services: guidelines for the future.**”

She asked the following question: “*Do we still have a mission to carry out in this world and in the Church?*” She presented the world as it is, and the Church in the new social and ecclesial context. This question about the durability of religious life preyed as much on the minds of religious, as on the clergy and the laity.

Is there really a future for Religious in active apostolic life? The work of the Council would help provide an answer. It called for a change of outlook, a dynamic renewal, an adaptation of structures and forms: “*Let us put on the mind of Jesus Christ.*”

For a strong renewal movement:

This requires an understanding of humanity, society and the Church: “*A deeper understanding of the doctrine of religious life itself and its relationship with the Church based on the Conciliar proceedings is to the task of renewal what the root is to the tree.*”

Adaptation of structures and of forms: After developing the theme at some length, Mother Guillemin was not content to deal with externals: dress, language or ways of acting, because it was a question of something deeper than the need to avoid shocking people, a rethinking of traditional structures was needed, bringing a new perspective to traditional realities, work settings and life conditions. Community life must be able to adapt to apostolic demands; this is part of religious witness. Structures of authority, an important aspect of adaptation, were presented as forces in the free exercise of responsibilities which are incumbent on most Sisters today.

In conclusion, Mother Guillemin noted: “*in a time of complete change, it seems that others expect from us an attitude of participation, of faithful sharing of what we are called to be, people who are in the world and yet totally given to God.*”

AT ROUEN TO ALL THE TEACHERS IN THE DIOCESE

On July 2nd, 1966 in the presence of Cardinal Martin, Mother Guillemin spoke to all the religious of the diocese on the subject of “**Religious after the Council: how they must live and carry out their work.**” She mentioned the importance of greater understanding of doctrine, a spirituality of action, special attention to the world, a missionary sense and the corporate aspect of religious life.

PARIS: AT THE 8TH CONGRESS OF UREP (Union of Religious in Parish schools)

On November 9th Mother Guillemin addressed religious teaching in parish schools who had gathered for the Congress. She indicated to them the way to “**Direct one’s life according to the spirit of Vatican II**” following the pathways laid out by

the Council, which was “*a Council of truth and freedom...a Council attentive to humanity and the world...a Council with universal perspectives.*”

CARCASSONNE: TO RELIGIOUS OF THAT DIOCESE

Mother Guillemin spoke to the Religious of the diocese of Carcassonne on how she saw **the religious of today as missionary**. “our mission is to be part of the Church in order to continue the mission of Christ.

This mission requires us to be very sincere in what we “incarnate.” We need to have a deep and genuine knowledge of the people among whom we work and a life style that is as close as possible to theirs.

The mission needs religious women

The mission gathers together the People of God for the missions

The conference in Carcassonne was published in the bulletin “*Omnis Terra*” in April 1969 and reproduced in the French edition of *Osservatore Romano* on April 25th-May 2nd of that year.

The chaplain for religious in Canada had the text printed in a small, well designed collection of her works, and declared: “In my opinion, the excerpts from one of the last conferences of Mother Guillemin deserve to be published in a brochure. She brought together in a succinct way the major doctrinal and practical perspectives of renewal and presented these in a masterly way. May the enlightening message of Mother Guillemin help religious to carry out the enormous work of renewal already in progress, in fidelity to the Church’s Magisterium. It is for this reason that this brief, specific and condensed text is made available to them.” Signed Marc-André Paulin, Chaplain.

IN THE SERVICE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Justice and Peace Commission

Among the countless treasures resulting from the Conciliar Acts, Mother Guillemin chose to focus on a short passage from Article 2 of *Perfectae Caritatis* concerning **social justice**: “Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church. In such a way, judging current events wisely in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to assist men more effectively.”

Mother Guillemin declared: “*These lines are of capital importance for the interior and exterior renovation of our Company. Little by little we shall set out all its perspectives. Let us begin with a few reflections on some points about social justice which are the essential condition of our relationship with those around us. The subject is so vast that there can be no possibility of going into each point that comes up. As Daughters of Charity, we must be very attentive to the development of concepts linked to charity and justice, in the Church and in the world, so that they may inspire our conduct.*” (*Echo*, June 1966, p. 423) This article by Mother Guillemin appeared in the *Echo* of the Motherhouse in June 1966 under the title: “**Some aspects of social justice.**” It was a response to article 2 of the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, “*not in order to deal with the whole document, which is quite*

long, but to obey its precepts by studying some of its findings that have a direct bearing on the works of our vocation."

On 1st March 1967, Father Jamet, the Director General, announced that the Church had established a **Justice and Peace Commission**; a week later Mother Guillemin was named by Pope Paul VI to be a **Consultant** for the Commission. The encyclical *Populorum Progressio* by Paul VI, had moved a journalist draw attention to the Pope's courage : "*he dared to say it.*" This encyclical was not just theory, but went into far more detail than usual. The Justice and Peace Commission were given the task of applying the principles set out in the encyclical. Cardinal Roy, Archbishop of Quebec, was President of the Commission comprising 13 members, 10 of whom were members of the laity, experts in matters of development and representing international organisations. The Commission included, among others, 13 Consultants, 4 of whom were bishops, one religious: Mother Guillemin, 4 lay people and 4 priests.

Mother Guillemin would attend the first session during the month of April and the second which would be held in October at the San Calisto Palace in Rome. By the beginning of the session, 6 Committees had been established to allow the Commission to maintain continuity in carrying out its programme.

The Commission, Pope Paul VI would say, had no other function than to keep the Church's eyes open, its heart sensitive and its hands ready to carry out the works of charity that it is called to provide for the world in order to promote the progress of the poorest peoples and to encourage social justice among the nations.

For Mother Guillemin, this was fully in line with the vocation of a Daughter of Charity, and she gave herself to it wholeheartedly.

Mother Guillemin's final work

Religious life had for centuries been regulated by a collection of canonical norms. The Second Vatican Council left its own particular mark. It escaped no one's notice that the renewal of religious life would only come about through a revision of canonical rules concerning the organisation of religious life.

Since formation depends above all else on its members, these were the object of a special survey. The Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes received the responses. After much reflection on the proposals made concerning the various stages of formation, they judged it appropriate to broaden the scope of the survey.

Mother Guillemin was among the 5 Religious called to work as "Consultants." This was to be her final work. On 10th March 1968, she sent her "copy" to Rome, addressing certain points dealing with "The formation of young religious." The responses were recorded in four documents. The contents of these will not be presented here. Mother Guillemin, was characteristically firm but well-balanced in what she wrote.

As we read *Renovationis Causam*, it is easy to spot new expressions relating to formation: although charisms vary, members should each remain firm in the vocation to which they have been called.

On 6th January 1969, the new provisional norms were put into effect.

Mother Guillemin went home to God on 28th March 1968: “*Yes, my God, I love you with my whole being.*”

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Service

Appendix

THE INSERTION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

The study done by Mother Suzanne Guillemin, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity on this important question merits our recognition

Introduction

The insertion of religious life into the Church, and in the Church’s name, into the world, is nothing more than the living accomplishment of the pastoral goal of the work of the Council.

The effort made to renew religious life *takes place within the efforts* of the Church that seeks to bring about “what Christ lived, wanted and loved” (Eccl. Suam, II) in order that it might “serve as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family.” (Gaudium et Spes no. 40)

Each of our religious families, as members of the Church, recognises its responsibility for working towards *the unity of the Church*, and to ensure that it “*goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does.*” (Gaudium et Spes, no 40) This brings about the two challenges of insertion; its scope goes far beyond the range of any individual Congregation; we are touching on the mission of the Church itself.

It is the challenge that Vatican II put forward of entering into contact and dialogue with the world. Now, each member of the Church, individuals and institutions, must strive to be filled with the spirit of the Council and strive to carry out the conciliar work in their life.

The two sections of this presentation will consider the following:

- The spirit that must guide all attempts at insertion
- The challenges of life that we encounter.

I would ask you first of all to excuse the dry and itemised approach that this communication must take because of the time limits imposed; I hope that it will gain in clarity what is lost in warmth of expression.

SPIRIT

It is important to begin with the spirit.

Every effort at insertion that envisages reforms or new structures but which is not closely enough related to the spirit that should animate it, is doomed in advance either to failure or to long periods of trial and error and of taking the wrong direction until it allows itself to be influenced by the spirit. All methods used, are found to be inadequate, and all organisations are deficient to some extent. Only a spirit that relates to God by a life that has a clear theological basis and is guided by strong convictions and a heart truly converted to the Gospel, is able to face all circumstances of life and all its demands.

The spirit that must animate our search for insertion is simply “the spirit of the Council.” It is a spirit that combines the principles of doctrine and of ministry, a spirit capable of bringing about a strong attachment of heart without which there is no true interior conversion.

Doctrine

All the Council’s teaching is of concern to us, and the Conciliar Acts cannot be seen in isolation one from another. However, there are certain key points which open up major pathways of renewal with a view to authentic insertion in the Church and the world.

- First of all, the *powerful teaching on religious life* in chapter VI of *Lumen Gentium*.

- Then, the apostolate of the laity that is found both in *Lumen Gentium* as well as in the Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*

- Finally, the teaching clearly brought to light in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes, the relationship between the Church and the world*.

-

I will not dwell here on the doctrine of religious life that has been so admirably presented by Father Anastase of the Holy Rosary: “the divine gift,” “sign,” “to serve the mission of the Church”. Above all, let us remember that its teaching “belongs inseparably to the life and holiness” of the religious state.

In the face of prevailing currents of thought, we need this message in order to support our conviction: *religious life is necessary for the Church*. This presupposes that in the midst of even the most daring adaptations, religious life maintains its intrinsic identity. It is not primarily through the merits of any particular activity that religious life is necessary for the Church and has something to say to the world, but rather through the consecration of a person’s life to God.

A sense of the close incorporation of our religious Institutes in the Church, something given to the Church by the Lord, ordained for Christ’s mission, inseparable from its life, is one of the fundamental convictions that will ensure a balanced approach to our study.

It is the clear and solid conviction of our vocation in the Church that will allow us to approach with serenity the second key point: *the promotion of the laity in the apostolate*. Sadly we have to admit that, too often, this promotion has been perceived by us as an encroachment on our customary fields of action. Too often, as well, it has been opposed by militants and by certain members of the clergy, as though raising the status of the laity would make the presence of Religious unnecessary.

Vatican II has shed light on the doctrine of the laity, their place and their particular responsibilities in the Church. We will not be able to discover the right form of our insertion if we are not totally convinced of the legitimate role and place of the laity in the apostolate.

Gaudium et Spes, is classified as a pastoral Constitution but none the less it contains *authentic doctrine on the relationships of the Church and the world*.

The Church declares itself “in solidarity with humanity.” It defines in a striking way its manner of presence: “*The Church goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family.*” (*G. et S.*, 40).

Solidarity – service – exchanges - a trusting and animating presence. Of course we would not apply these principles in the same way that lay people do, but they are just as important in characterising the way that our presence in the world should be determined. If we are to be faithful to these principles, we will at times need to renounce certain secular customs.

Ministry

The pastoral intentions of the Council are seen not just in the texts it produced but in the impressively sincere way with it conducted its conferences and through its openness of heart and mind that led it to invite Observers and Auditors. The Council has initiated an Apostolate of truth, charity and unity.

Interior Renewal

Our relationships, whether personal or structural, whether inside or outside of the Congregation, will only be expressed in an appropriate way and at a fitting level when they have been rooted in the spirit of a firm balance between two fundamental convictions:

- Faith in the specific mission of Religious
- Faith in the mission of the laity.

Persons in both of these vocations are called to journey alongside the whole human race.

A genuine conversion of heart and spirit is the soul of renewal. Before coming to any practical decision, it is the responsibility of our General Superiors to evangelise our Institutes, to breathe into them the breath of charity, truth, and the search for unity that characterised the Council. They must teach the doctrine of the Council and

mobilise all the spiritual forces of the Congregation, forces of prayer, ideas and determination. An Institute that has mobilised its spiritual forces in such a way is already well on its way to renewal.

PROBLEMS OF LIFE

In the practical domain, we find three forms of insertion:

- our traditional settings
- the creation of new forms of insertion
- moving into structures.

In our traditional settings:

Before seeking new forms of insertion under the pretext of the need for apostolic contacts, it is important to first examine our traditional positions and the apostolic possibilities that they offer to us. Perhaps it is not a matter of the institution or the work itself, but the way in which this work is carried out, without taking into account the changes that are emerging or are to be introduced. Peoples' living conditions and their outlook on life are undergoing a complete change. We can cite some examples *in society*:

- *The great diversity of working schedules* in different countries and, within the country itself, in different regions. This calls for flexibility within the framework of community life, and a freedom to appreciate and make decisions at local level, or at least Provincial level.

- *The proliferation of social communication*. The people round us live on a global level, and are affected by all world events. A religious community that is cut off from this current that runs through hearts and minds will be remote and even morally absent from the human community around it, despite being physically present there.. This calls for a reasonable use of the mass media.

- *Promotion of women* has profound effects on the person and on religious life. While law and customs have kept women in a state of infantile dependency, the situation of subjection or constraint (which should not be confused with religious obedience) of the Religious, has not been equated with infantilism. In a world where most women have legal, civic and professional access, the Religious can no longer dream of being part of it if her obedience is not exercised within the context of responsibility and personal initiative, if she cannot fully carry out the professional role of which she is capable. It is a formation issue of authority and obedience.

- *The responsibility taken by the State for all forms of need*, and the transformation of acts of charity into professions. In a technical and organised world, competence and qualifications are underlying concepts that are both humane and necessary for apostolic work. Conforming to the legal, administrative and technical requirements of a profession is an act of elementary justice. There is no charity without justice. It is easy to see the repercussions that changes which will be made must have in terms of obedience. The fact of being a Religious can no longer, or to a much lesser degree, justify privilege in the exercise a profession. Otherwise, the

presence of the Religious would be considered detrimental to lay professionals, and religious witness would go unrecognised.

- *Socialisation*, the proliferation of organised relationships, in all domains and the introduction of more legal and administrative requirements. Each Religious is at the centre of a network of relationships that she must take on personally. This requires formation if she is to be able to work as part of a team of laypersons, without any privileges being given to her because she is a religious, and occupying a post that is subject to statutory requirements, in order to work cooperatively with “her colleagues”. This is not without influence on the way we live our community life and our “separation from the world.”

Our formation methods need to be reconsidered in this light, with the goal of creating solid inner convictions in each member, rather than developing measures of protection. This brings out the issue of an overly strict separation that holds sway in our Novitiates.

The need for experts to assist our General and Provincial Councils is also a consequence of the complex problems presented by a pervasive technology and socialisation.

If we want to be accepted and given our rightful place among the lay people of our times, it is important that the spirit of truth, charity and unity should first guide all our actions and change, little by little, the situations that have now become unacceptable in the eyes of our contemporaries.

In the Church, we find processes of change that are similar to what is occurring in the world, several of these have considerable influence on our role in the Church:

- *Liturgical reform*. The growing importance of the Word of God, the desire to create Christian communities united in prayer, and the adaptation of the liturgy to the mentality of the people of each country.

Entering into this movement of unity in the Church and making pastoral adaptations is the first important step of insertion that each Institute must take.

- *The apostolate of the laity*. This is one of the most delicate points. To effectively recognise the laity as “leaders” in apostolic matters implies giving them the same directive status or role as Religious have in organisations, listening to them, recognising their right to vote and take initiatives.

Every activity directed by a religious congregation contains within it certain roles for the laity; roles such as education, social, and others works are roles for the laity, and we work in these areas “*offering the Church’s sincere collaboration with the rest of humanity.*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, III – 2) Change in outlook will often lead to a change in methods of organisation.

- *The development of a combined ministry*, which must guide our relationships with the Church and our participation in its organisations. Collaborating with the

pastoral plan of the diocese, with national plans (policies regarding appointments to teaching posts and to where pupils go to school, amalgamations) more than being just something we desire, is a strict duty. Efforts to work with others even on a global level by answering missionary appeals, must be the subject of studies in which religious congregations are obliged to take part. Congregations need to move away from a certain sense of isolationism and think as “Church” through their concerted action within the Church.

In creating new forms of insertion:

This is both our greatest hope and our biggest temptation. It will mean life or death for our Institutes, either through fainthearted abstention or unbridled audacity.

Some attempts are being made by the Church in this domain. The issue is being addressed by certain sincere but not very enlightened people who do not understand the particular message of religious life. They try to find means of redevelopment, and experience has shown these to be not well thought out and dangerously entangled with schemes run by the laity. In order to justify its existence, religious life must remain authentic. It is true, however, that the Lord expects creative efforts from us, not just changing old situations.

In matters of government, prudence often lies in knowing how to take risks. Our general trend should always be that of seeking poverty and proximity to the people through a way of life that more closely resembles an imitation of Christ whose genuine incarnation in our world amazes and confounds us. We can do this in a variety of ways: Individual Sisters working in the public services, Religious workers etc.

The Holy Spirit’s inspirations do not have pre-established criteria. There are, however, certain principles based on ordinary good sense that are irrefutable:

- an experiment must respond to a real Church need – it must be in line with the specific vocation of the Institute,
- the more bold and daring the experiment, the greater the need to involve only those religious members who have attained human and religious maturity.
- the “voice of the people”, that is, of a large number of Sisters in support of an issue, is often an expression of the working of the Holy Spirit,
- every new experimental situation requires preparation “as Church”.

In any case, it is of the utmost importance that the situations in which the Sisters are involved demonstrate clearly the values of consecration and community living. Part of the witness characteristic of religious life is an element of proclamation to others.

Insertion in structures:

At the end of the Council, the Church intensified its organisational efforts. Jean Guitton said: *“The bishops arrived at the Council as bishops; when they left, they had become an ‘episcopate.’ The laypeople came to the Council as laypeople; and now in the Church they form ‘the laity.’”*

A similar change occurred in religious life, specifically by the creation of our Union: *a corporate dimension of religious life was drawn up*. This is the only way we can enter into structural relationships within the Church and in society.

Religious life is present in all the sensitive aspects of human need, wherever universal attention is focused, although it may be in a fragmented and disorganised way which does not adequately represent our unity in proclaiming and representing the Church in social structures.

Religious life now has structures that allow it to put its resources at the service of the Church and society in ways that are appropriate. In more or less advanced ways, depending on the country concerned and the experience of the Unions of Religious, the work of unity (I am not saying unification) must be the object of ongoing study.

This presupposes that these Unions of Religious have their own particular and autonomous life, independent of (although clearly collaborative with) other organisations such as the Unions of Religious Superiors, Caritas, etc.

This brings with it new requirements: *formation of Religious* with a view to the work of animation, representation, and study within these Unions. *There is a real need to make some of our members available for these roles, a true service to the Church.*

The Unions of Major Superiors must be concerned, in the various countries, with ensuring the presence of Religious in the different organisations in the Church and in society *with a mandate to represent religious life*. In implementing these mandates, great attention should be paid to making sure that both the Congregation's authority over the member be respected, as well as the competence of the Union of Major Superiors with regard to delegation with regard to any point of general interest for religious life.

At the level of society

The presence of Religious within professional and administrative organisations is of the utmost importance: ministry councils for issues relating to social assistance, hospitals, etc., professional organisations committees, committees for the development of educational programmes, etc.

I will not speak about the links we have established at international level, since our dear Mother Secretary has already discussed this in the opening session. Something that should be mentioned, however, is the question of joining the CICIAMS² for Religious who are nurses, the only Catholic organisation that allows them a presence at OMS³. Religious are also present on an individual basis in UCISS⁴.

At Church level:

² International Catholic Commission for International Nurses and Medical-Social Assistants

³ World Health Organisation

⁴ International Catholic Union of Social Services

The decree concerning the pastoral office of bishops stresses that “*in the whole diocese or in any particular areas of it, the coordination and close connection of all apostolic works should be fostered under the direction of the bishop. Thus all undertakings and organisations...should be directed toward harmonious action. So at the same time the unity of the diocese will also be made more evident.*” (*Christus Dominus*, n. 17)

Our efforts with regard to insertion in ministry are a response to the Church’s desire for unity, which it is constantly expressing

It occurs at all levels where the Church is organised: parish, diocesan, national, universal.

Although everyone accepts it in theory, the insertion of religious life takes place slowly; gains must be made one by one. In general it is on the parish level that the situation shows more progress; in multiple parish ministry committees, Religious are naturally members of these.

On the non-geographical level of the Catholic Action Movements as well, a marked improvement in relationships has been initiated. It is no longer rare to find Religious invited to meetings, work groups, and to be part of coordinating commissions, as representatives of religious life.

The organisation of relationships between the Episcopate and Women in religious life obviously constitutes the most delicate and most significant aspect of the insertion of Religious in the Church in any country. The means of implementing this are being studied everywhere, with allowance for differences arising from the particular circumstances of each country.

The work can be organised simultaneously on several different levels; one of these would be at the level of the Episcopal Conference and the Union of Major Superiors, through the intermediary of a Commission of Bishops in cooperation with the Committee of the Union. On another level, matters relating to particular issues, can be discussed by Religious with a mandate from the Union to participate in the work of a specialised commission of the Episcopal Conference (social action, education, missions, pastoral ministry, etc.) In countries where the Episcopal Conference has pastoral regions established, it seems necessary that the Unions of Religious develop a structure that will promote dialogue at this level as well.

An important point regarding relationships with the Episcopate of a country is naturally the call for religious to take part in the diocesan synods; several Religious have already been designated for this difficult role. We dare not look ahead to the Episcopal Synod of 1968, as we do not know whether its structures and goals have in mind the possibility of Religious being present.

It should be noted that, since the birth of the our Union, His Excellency Bishop Paul Philippe never ceases to encourage us to express our desire to be present wherever issues are being addressed that concern not only religious life in itself, but all its many spheres of activity, and even in the general interests of the Church. On several occasions there has been talk of including Religious on the commissions that studying canonical issues, for example.

In conclusion

If we were to outline a table of future perspectives, we might do so as follows, while stressing always that these individual perspectives must be more or less in accordance with the situation in different countries.

The life of women Religious in its active form is approaching a new era it will be characterised by a changing situation in the Church and by a profound transformation of its relationship with the world.

- In the past, Religious life took on almost all the works of society and the Church in response to human needs: education, hospitality, care, relief of poverty, etc., and considered this to be its exclusive domain. Religious are now seen more and more as witnesses to Christ, working with the laity, in Church institutions and civil organisations that take responsibility for humanity's needs, and they have just a collaborative role in these works.

- In the past, each Religious carried out in community all the activities of her apostolic life and kept the world at a distance through a series of protective measures. Now, personally involved in a professional post that has legal obligations, she works all day, in most cases, in a team made up of lay people, priests and religious from other congregations.

- In times past Religious were divided up into a multitude of little islands formed by various Institutes. Now Religious are more cohesive and organised to provide a better service for the Church and for humanity.

- This movement of inserting ourselves into the world, living in proximity to the people, in union with the Church, is rapidly gaining momentum but it is not without its risks. We have already admitted its initial consequences: the danger of total assimilation into a secular lifestyle while rejecting some of the essential values of religious life, the danger of unifying religious families in a sort of mass uniformity; a real danger of religious life becoming weakened, and if God does not watch over it, the risk of its disappearing altogether because its function has been absorbed by the laity. In the work of insertion that we have to undertake after the Council, and in the experiments that must be initiated, it is essential to remember that:

The more emphasis is placed on proximity to the world, the more we must deepen and make more "fervent our union with Christ."

The more we strive for unity in religious life in the universal Church, the more we must distinguish and affirm the specific vocation of each religious family.

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Service

Consultant to the Congregation of Religious

Official Nomination
Pontifical Secretariat of State

The Holy Father has enrolled among the Consultants of
the Sacred Congregation
for Religious and Secular Institutes,
Mother Suzanne Louise Guillemin
Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity of
Saint Vincent de Paul.

Mother Guillemin is hereby notified of this appointment
for all useful purposes and the establishment of good order.

Given at the Vatican 22nd February 1968
signed : Cardinal Cicognan