



## The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life

Editorial	1
The “Visit of God” (Ex 3:16) and Paul’s Missiology as Identity formation in Galatians: A Biblical Justice and Identity Recipes for “The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life”. <i>Ayodele Ayeni, C.S.Sp</i>	2
“El cambiante panorama de la vida religiosa misionera” Reflexiones Y Preguntas en Torno a Las Finanzas Y la Gestion Economica en Tiempos de Disminucion - Desafíos y retos que tenemos que afrontar. <i>Marian Murcia, SFB</i>	17
Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life: Formation and Vowed Life <i>Josephine Enenmo, OLA</i>	22
SEDOS Closing Homily – 5 May 2023 <i>Mary Barron, OLA</i>	31
Moving Forward Together <i>André-Léon Simonart, M.Afr</i>	33
Group Sharing	34
Evaluation – Some Thoughts of Participants	38
How can what we do become truly meaningful and fruitful? <i>René Stockman, FC</i>	42

## ***SEDOS***

*(Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission)  
is a forum open to Roman-Catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life,  
which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of Global Mission.  
It encourages research and disseminates information  
through its Bulletin, Website, Seminars and Workshops.*

### **Members of the SEDOS Executive Committee 2023**

Mary Barron, OLA (President)

Alain Mayama, CSSp (Vice President)

John Paul Herman, SVD (Director)

Maria Jerly, SSps (Bursar)

Chris Chaplin, MSC

Anna Damas, SSps

Geni Santos Camargo, SFB

André-Léon Simonart, M.AFR

Oyidu Okwori, SHCJ

René Stockman, FC

### **SEDOS BULLETIN 2023**

**Editor:** Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD

**Secretariat:** Sr. Celine Kokkat, CJMJ

**Translations:** Ms. Philippa Wooldridge

**Printing:** Tipografia DON BOSCO

#### **Editorial Committee**

André-Léon Simonart, M.AFR

René Stockman, FC

*SEDOS Bulletin is a bi-monthly publication, and is free of charge for SEDOS Members (max. 3).  
The yearly subscription is: €30 in Europe, €45 outside Europe.  
For further information, advice, or change in subscription,  
please write to: [redacsed@sedosmission.org](mailto:redacsed@sedosmission.org)*

The digital version of the articles, and English translation of most of the articles  
can be found on the SEDOS website: [www.sedosmission.org](http://www.sedosmission.org) .  
The digital version can be received by email for free on a regular basis.  
Do let us know if you are interested.

## *Editorial*



**Dear Members  
and Readers,**

The current issue of the Bulletin is a continuation of the Residential Seminar theme on, “The Changing Landscape of Religious

Missionary Life.” It contains more reflections; planning and visualising where and how we can forge our way in the future with the new understanding of mission.

After the rich inputs by various Speakers on the theme, the participants undertook real soul-searching. It was like standing at crossroads and choosing the direction to continue the missionary journey as religious.

At the end of the Seminar everyone was anxious to know what awaits us. After deliberating on the theme, “Changing landscape of missionary religious life”, there were some serious reflections on what lies before us. The main question was, “What are we going to take along?” We see lots of changes in and around us. There are external and internal changes that shape our identity as religious and as missionaries which raise another question as to what is our role in these constant and ongoing changes. At this juncture, each one of us must ask the question – “What am I and what is my mission in this context?” We live in a troubled world. We see people suffering from growing violence like war, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, suffering from epidemics, suffering from pollution of various kinds; besides, many are suffering from hunger, poverty and oppression. The situation naturally leads to depression and hopelessness. But we have the consoling words of the Gospel that give us strength and hope. In his parting message Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God;

believe also in me” (Jn 14:1). We just need to have faith and follow him and he leads us to green pastures. Just like YAHWEH who led his people to the land that he had promised. He led Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and Joseph. Whenever the Israelites lost sight of the path to the Promised Land, God brought them back. He always visited his people and he continue to visit his people even today. He is alive in history. We have nothing to fear, be it the reduced number of vocations or the empty churches. He was there during the terrible events in past and present today in our difficult times to guide and lead us.

Nothing passes God unnoticed. It is he who prepares our destiny and leads us on. Today, through the changing landscape, Jesus is letting us glimpse our new destiny, the Promise Land. What we need is to have faith, follow him, for he is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6).

I am sure the Bulletin will enlighten us all and lead us to deepen reflections on our life as a religious and missionary and help us to lead the Way, the way forward.

Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD  
Director of SEDOS



Ayodele Ayeni, C.S.Sp.

## The “Visit of God” (Ex 3:16) and Paul’s Missiology as Identity formation in Galatians

### A Biblical Justice and Identity Recipes for “The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life”

#### Introduction

Ours is the age of justice.<sup>1</sup> Each time our contemporaries evoke #metoo, someone is either calling for justice in the form of recognition and respect or identifying in solidarity with the lack thereof. We may debate the parameters of justice; nevertheless, many cry for it in their own



ways today. Our streets, courts and social media platforms have become the arena to seek for justice. The place of the religious missionary life in this scheme of things colours what follows.

Indeed, since the promulgation of the document *Perfectae Caritatis* on the renewal of religious life, which should be read alongside *Lumen Gentium* 43-47 on the religious identity, the religious landscape has changed significantly. A detailed evolution of the transformations experienced thus far is beyond the scope of this article. However, the debate on the theme and limit of the concept of *sequela Christi* makes the imitation of Christ the cornerstone of the religious experiment and experience. If there is a singular contribution I want to make to the concept of “sequela Christi”, it is to argue

that we need to reformulate it to read “to follow God in imitation of Christ”. This is imperative, to see that *sequela Christi* has an antecedent in the activities of God-the-Father (Phil 2:11)<sup>2</sup> and must continue *in tandem* with the economy of salvation in which Jesus-as-Lord (Phil 2:11)<sup>3</sup> associates his followers in the “Great Commission” (Matt 28:18-20).

Beginning with the contemporary quests for judicial and public domain justice – justice through the courts and in the streets – signifying what I call “the age of justice”, I posit the “visit” of God to Israel in Egypt as the foundation of biblical social justice, pursued in the “visit” of God in Christ. I argue that every missionary endeavour must be a perpetuation of the theo-centric visits that are couched in “justice issues”. Consequently, I propose that the justice of God must be ours as well, if we must respond to the contemporary changing missiological landscape opened by the “age of justice”, my nomenclature for our 21st century.

A disclaimer is *ad rem* here. To attempt giving a comprehensive overview of the ideas floating in the academia as to how to ground the contemporary multi-polar world is herculean! I have no pretensions of doing any significant justice to their individual

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive take on “justice issues”, see Ayodele Ayeni, “Evangelization as Justice Issues: The Spiritan Legacy for the World”, *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 34, 2022, 136-160.

---

<sup>2</sup> On this formula, see Ayodele Ayeni, “From the Formula ‘To the Glory of God the Father’ (Phil 2:11) to the Forgotten Theology of Phil 2:6-11 as Pauline Formula for Monotheism”, *Science et Esprit* 73, 2021, 359-374; Ibid, “From the Formula ‘To the Glory of God the Father’ (Phil 2:11) to the Forgotten Theology of Phil 2:6-11 as Pauline Formula for Monotheism”, *Science et Esprit* 74, 2022, 81-102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



analyses. On the contrary, I wish to highlight some of the theories that have come to shape our collective thinking and debate about the world. It is up to the charisms of individual religious communities to adapt to the issues impinging on the unique contributions their charisms bring to bear on the world of today. Of course, I take it for granted that the unique charisms of all religious communities (Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) are already addressing aspects of “justice issues”.

### 1. When “naming” circumscribes hermeneutics

It is my contention that we need to name or provide a name for our times. Within the concept of “naming” is a certain delimitation. Grammatically, proper nouns limit the scope of a name to one thing or person. In the world of ideas and concepts, naming guarantees a certain cognitive “mastery” for a functional use of a nomenclature/name. “Naming” our present time is heuristic, I believe, to providing an intellectual discursive engagement with missionary imperatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Without a clear naming of the present times<sup>4</sup>, whatever recipes proposed for it will not be adequate for the missionary religious response demanded by our times.

It is good to start out with previous attempts at naming the present times. David Tracy seems pessimistic about finding a grounding principle or a name for the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He points out the cracks in past harmonising theories – modernism and post-modernism – that name the current epoch:

#### **We live in an age that cannot name itself.**

For some, we are still in that age of modernity and the triumph of the bourgeois subject. For others, we are in a time of the levelling of all traditions and await the return of the repressed traditional and communal subject. For yet others, we are in a postmodern moment where the death of the

subject is now upon us as the last receding wave of the death of God. These three conflicting namings of the present situation are at the heart of the conflict of interpretations in that place which was once construed as the center of history – Western, including Western Christian theological, culture. But as its own conflict on how to name itself shows, that Western center cannot hold.<sup>5</sup>

I agree with the assessment of Tracy that the search for a name for our times should precede missionary engagement for efficiency purposes. To my mind, the reason for and the nature of missionary endeavours need clarifications if “[w]e live in an age that cannot name itself”, should missionaries want to be relevant to the needs of the world they evangelise. The exercise in naming helps religious missionaries to understand the contexts of evangelisation and approach it purposefully.

However, it would be naïve to imagine that all nomenclatural vestiges of modernism – secularism, liberal democracy, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, etc. – have vanished from our vocabulary. As a matter of fact, “secularism” is the nomenclature that undergirds Pope Benedict XVI’s call for a “New Evangelisation” as an instance of the vitality of that concept today, and an attempt at naming our times. According to Pope Benedict XVI:

I opened the way for a reflection to begin on a subject I had pondered over for a long time: the need to offer a specific response to a moment of crisis in Christian life which is occurring in many countries, especially those of ancient Christian tradition . . . The term, ‘New evangelization’ recalls the need for a renewed manner of proclamation, especially for those who live in a context, like the one today, in which the development of **secularization** has had a heavy impact, even in traditionally Christian countries.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Since changes are so rapid and multifaceted, I chose to use the plural form of “time”.

<sup>5</sup> David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church*, New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XI*

Benedict XVI underscores three points of interest: (1) secularism is the name of our times; (2) secularism creates a crisis of evangelisation today; and (3) missionaries need a new approach to missionary engagement with the word today. These three elements aptly describe the preoccupation, I believe, SEDOS's conference of this year 2023 – “The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life” – attempts to address.

Benedict XVI's intuitions on secularism are still with us today. Indeed, secularism still makes the rounds of our academic discourses, but Charles Taylor argues that it is shading off its old meaning as understood as being atheistic or anti-religion (the “moment of crisis in Christian life” of Pope Benedict XVI), while mutating into a “defender” of God in public places. For instance, Taylor portrays secularism as protecting religion when he says that,

It is generally agreed that modern democracies have to be ‘secular.’ There is perhaps a problem, a certain ethnocentricity, involved in this term. But even in the Western context the term is not limpid. What in fact does it mean? I believe that there are at least two models of what constitutes a secular regime. Both involve some kind of separation of church and state. The state can't be officially linked to some religious confession; except in a vestigial and largely symbolic sense, as in England or Scandinavia . . . We think that secularism (or *laïcité*) has to do with the relation of state and religion; whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity.<sup>7</sup>

---

to Participants in the Plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 2011, par. 1–2.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor, “Why we Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism”, in Eduardo Mendieta et al. (ed.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press/SSRC Book, 2011, pp. 34–36.

It is important to recall that Taylor calls our age “A Secular Age”.<sup>8</sup> “Secularism” has been one of the mainstays of Taylor's contributions to the understanding of our times. His conception of secularism, however, does not square with that of Pope Benedict XVI. While Taylor thinks that secularism defends diversity and religious freedom, the very diversity Taylor defends offends the unitary perspective that Benedict XVI sees as the pre-condition for comprehending our age.

Pope Benedict XVI is not alone in considering the inability to have a common descriptive nomenclature for our time as being part of the crisis of our times. Jean-Paul Sartre argues the same position from a Euro-centric position, when he says that “Europe is springing leaks everywhere. What then has happened? It is simply that in the past we made history and now it is being made of us”.<sup>9</sup> This statement admits that non-Europeans too are thinking and shaping their lives in other ways. Missionaries would need to take account of other currents of thinking when they engage the world and abandon a demoded view of a unipolar world.

### 1.1 Reading the Present Times for Missiological purposes

If Taylor calls our age “secular”, its North-Atlantic coloration has not gone unnoticed by its failure to address the realities in the Global South. This simply means that the “Secular Age” as the name of our times remains sectional and not global. The same criticism, *mutatis mutandis*, could be leveled at Pope Benedict XVI's couching of the “New Evangelization” in secularist garb.

---

<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard, Mass./London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 1 (Taylor's footnotes reveal his debates with other scholars, who think that secularism is a by-product of modernity).

<sup>9</sup> Amartya Sen, “What Happened to Europe?” in *The New Republic*, August 2, 2012 (<https://newrepublic.com/article/105657/sen-europe-democracy-keynes-social-justice>) accessed on January 7, 2021.

Benedict XVI's encouragement to a return to "a unitary matrix", which will favor evangelization and the faith in Europe, falls short of the *catholica* – the universality and universalism of the Church. He argues that:

It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied. Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a **unitary cultural matrix**, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by

developed at a particular moment of their history, because the faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture".<sup>11</sup>

Although Catholic position on secularism seems to be playing catch up with the academia, nevertheless, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism<sup>12</sup> further stretch the borders of our secular world. The idea that every human being should feel comfortable where they find themselves is the trump-card of cosmopolitanism championed since Greek sophist philosophy.

More than cosmopolitanism, secularism and modernism, liberal democracy has far reaching impacts around the world. Missionaries must not fail to realise that



it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound **crisis of faith** that has affected many people.<sup>10</sup>

If Pope Benedict XVI's position on secularism in Europe wears Sartrean looks of a collapsed unitary centre, Pope Francis' appropriation of secularism opts for the Taylorian perspective – diversity. According to Pope Francis, diversity should be the context of evangelisation today: "We cannot demand that peoples of every continent, in expressing their Christian faith, imitate modes of expression which European nations

liberal democracy, in all shapes and sizes, is trending around the world. Despite alternative political systems, missionaries need to attend to "freedom" and the way people construe it. Liberal democracy, with its double signification of "freedom and equality", finds resonances globally. John Charvet surmises the indices of liberal democracy in these terms:

Liberalism attaches fundamental value to leaving individuals as free as possible to decide for themselves what to believe, where

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio*, *Porta Fidei*, 2 (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, par. 118

<sup>12</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriot", *Critical Inquiry*, vol 23:3, 1997, 617-639.

to live, who to associate with and how to conduct their economic and sexual relations.... freedom and equality must be interpreted together to form the basis of a coherent practice [of liberalism]. For instance, suppose some people believe that their religion requires them to persecute, expel or even kill non-believers.

The kind of freedom Charvet articulates has a tint of post-modernism in comparison to Giddens' summary of Jean-François Lyotard's exposé on post-modernism: "The post-modern outlook sees a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge, in which science does not have a privileged place".<sup>13</sup> Is this not an opening for "God-talk" and the return of God into public square?

One of the weaknesses of the unipolar world, and the different theoretical currents I mentioned earlier, points to the fact that a group of individuals are thinking for others, while considering the others simply as the recipients of the think-tanks' position. This scenario is fast disappearing. A strong current of self-representative and self-appropriation of ideas is trending all over the world today. It wears the label "#metoo". Individuals subscribe personally to the condemnation of injustices and call for justice in its stead. They seek justice in the streets and before tribunals. These individuals refuse the idea of sacred cows and hiding places for culprits of injustice. Some have embraced both extremes of "wokeness", far removed from its Afro-American civil rights movement's foundations.

What is important to note, at this juncture, is the liberal individualism attendant in #metoo movements, which religious missionary life needs to contend with. The opened window of secularism that provides for legally defended religious freedom is the opportunity religious missionary life needs to

cash in for evangelization today. However, the flavour of evangelization must be tainted with justice issues for it to be palatable in our times.

## 1.2 God the Problem: The Challenge of "The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life"

For members of SEDOS, as a Christian group, the major challenge of the present "changing landscape" is the general refusal to put God as the referent of human life and liberty. Individualism has trained most of the peoples of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to start their definition of liberty from the self – "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". It encourages consensus adhesion to issues individuals feel attracted to. It has arrived at the bus stop of #metoo. However, mapping the contours of "God the problem" for discursive purposes, Gillespie construes "secularist modernity" in these words:

Modernity is a secular realm in which man replaces God as the center of existence and seeks to become the master and possessor of nature by the application of a new science and its attendant technology. The modern world is conceived as the realm of individualism, of representation and subjectivity, of exploration and discovery, of freedom, rights, equality, toleration, liberalism, and nation states.<sup>14</sup>

The contrived autonomy of individualism and its attendant crises are déjà vu. In the past, occasioned by the "nominalist crisis", the turn to the individual engendered two sources of malaise—moral and philosophical crises—that so unsettled the late medieval age that three approaches to resolving them ensued: 1) there was the rise of humanism as a source of moral compass from non-Christian sources, to fill in the gap left by theological disorientation. Petrarch preferred Roman models or stoic ideals as moral

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford, CA/UK: Polity/Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, London, U.K./Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2008, pp. x-xi.



stalwarts.<sup>15</sup> Cato, Cicero and Seneca are some of the Roman authors he explored for moral compass. This humanism will evolve in two directions—Southern (Italian) and Northern (Christian) humanisms. 2) The evangelistic simplicity of Christian life and the “*Imitatio Christi*” were the options of the non-clerical members of the Church begun by Francis of Assisi; and 3) the nominalist theology that challenged the *status quo ante*.<sup>16</sup>

The late medieval identification of the Church with both spiritual and political powers made the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular impossible. This situation was built on centuries of amalgamation of faith and reason or the marriage between Jerusalem and Athens. The philosophical foundations of Christian articulations of doctrines, especially Platonic philosophy, foisted during the Christological debates that bedeviled the early years of Christianity, began to reveal fissures with the nominalist twist. The disintegration of the medieval organistic theology (organon), where reality was conceived as a whole or as one, initiated a crisis of unity in the Christian faith that the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and Modernism will fail to adequately address, but continues to our day in the form of “The Malaise of Modernism”.<sup>17</sup>

The moral and philosophical crisis the world is experiencing currently, I suggest, alongside Claude Geffré, do not write the dirge of God. On the contrary, religious missionary life only needs to re-strategize its approach to mission. There is clearly room

for evangelization today, as Geffré avers in his analyses of modernist twists and turns:

Si on veut déceler les racines de la dynamique propre au processus de modernisation, on doit faire appel aux concepts de subjectivité et de rationalité. Le passage à la modernité coïncide avec l'émergence d'un sujet humain conscient de son autonomie et avec la victoire d'une approche rationnelle de tous les phénomènes de la nature et de la société (qu'il s'agisse du progrès scientifique, de la mécanisation industrielle, de la rationalisation d'une économie de marché ou de la centralisation bureaucratique de l'État moderne). Or, sous la double modalité d'une subjectivité inviolable et d'une rationalité triomphante, on constate que le christianisme et la modernité entretiennent des rapports qui ne sont pas seulement faits de rivalité conflictuelle. On peut découvrir aussi des rapports de proximité.<sup>18</sup>

Aside the “conflictual rivalry” between Christianity and modernism which Geffré underscores, I make bold to suggest an intuition on “biblical justice” as one recipe for the crisis that religious missionary life faces in its work today.

## 2. Thinking Biblical Justice through the “visit” of God (Ex 3:16) as Recipe to The “Age of Justice”

After an excursus on the state of the question on “naming” our times, it is high time I suggested an alternative from a theological perspective because “missionary religious life” is the focus of this article. Consequently, the multifaceted theories of “naming” our times the academia throws at us spur me to interrogate the overarching tendencies of people across all continents in response to happenings to other human beings, animals, and ecology elsewhere. I notice that justice issues galvanise peoples

<sup>15</sup> Today, promoters of “cosmopolitanism” return to the sophists. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots”, *Critical Inquiry* 23/3, 1997, 617-639; P. Kleingeld, “Cosmopolitanism”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2002, (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>) accessed May 6, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, passim.

<sup>17</sup> In this book, Taylor lists the elements of modernity that challenge the status quo ante. See Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, House of Anansi Press, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Claude Geffré, “La modernité, un défi pour le christianisme et l'islam”, *Théologiques* 9/2, 135–156; Jean Ladrière, “Théologie et modernité”, *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 27/2, 1996, 174-199.

around the world. It is commonplace to observe the use of “#metoo” to empathise and demonstrate against whatever impacts others negatively without having to know personally the people affected. For example, the ArabSprings in North Africa, #Endsars in Nigeria, the undying civil rights issues in America, the call for colonial accountability, post-colonial literature, immigrations, Islamophobia, antisemitism, gender violence, wokeness, veil crisis in Iran, etc. they all receive global solidarity under “freedom” and respect.

The cries for justice across all continents and the supports that gets from all and sundry suggests the nomenclature the “age of justice” as the harmonising concept to describe our times. All seekers of justice around the world are those reshaping and “naming” our times as the “age of justice” and accountability. These peoples are Africans, Asians, Europeans, Latinos, Euro-Asians, Americans, name it. But how does one implicate Christian missionary endeavours in this age of justice?

The Bible contains multiple justice issues, especially the relations between Israel/Judah and its neighbours. There are intra-Israel/Judah justice issues as well. However, I locate the root of God’s justice that perdures into the New Testament in the concept of the “visit” (*paqad/episkeptomai*) of God in Ex 3:16: “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely **visited** you, and *seen* that which is done to you in Egypt” (KJV).

The context of Ex 3 provides us with three major arguments that shift the understanding of justice away from its legalistic etymological definition – *jus-juris* – to intervention for liberation and salvation. The “visit” of God (Ex 3:16) makes justice “God’s intervention” in contexts **he considers as unjust**, after “visitation”/ “inspection” and “seeing” the accusation put forward by complainants. The “visit” of God

is for salvation and liberation<sup>19</sup> from unjust structures and shackles. It is context specific, hence, defies precise definitional circumscription.

The visit of God is an intervention in all justice issues to bring about salvation and liberation. Above all, it is an invitation to be imitated. Wherever God intervenes for justice, his disciples must follow suit. My contention is that the examples of God’s “visits” are the circumscriptions and jurisdictions of intervention for justice in all generations.<sup>20</sup>

The second uniqueness of the visit of God (Ex 3) is its desire to create a harmonised human identity as children of God. God’s “Paternity” of humanity is the biblical formula of universal identity.<sup>21</sup> The segregationist identification of Israel under its genealogical definition<sup>22</sup> – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – was both substituted for by the unique name YHWH and the subjugation of all other names of deities under YHWH or monotheism.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The dominant contexts of the use of God’s visit *paqad/episkeptomai* in the Hebrew Scripture is to punish. However, Luke alone takes up its salvific understanding and associates it with the soteriological actions of God in Jesus Christ. Our interest in the positive use of God’s “visit” presupposes Luke’s appropriation of the “visit” of God as salvific in the *Benedictus* (Lk 1:68, 78-79) and the raising of the dead son of the widow of Nain (Lk 1:68-78-79).

<sup>20</sup> The idea of “memoria Dei”, which I cannot develop here, is germane to this understanding, because the Holy Spirit leads the Church “into complete truth”. See Ayodele Ayeni, “‘Memoria’: A New Hermeneutic Principle in Pontifical Theology? The Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* and its Tillardian Contextualization”, *Science et Esprit* 69/3, 2017, 401-426.

<sup>21</sup> Marie-Joseph Lagrange, “La Paternité de Dieu dans l’Ancien Testament,” *Revue Biblique* 5, 1908, 481-499.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Crüsemann, “Human Solidarity and Ethnic Identity: Israel’s Self- Definition in the Genealogical System of Genesis,” in Mark G. B (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, 57-76.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy”, in Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Bervard S. Childs*, Grand Rapids,

The third identity foundation of Ex 3 is the fact that Israel went out of Egypt a mixed-race<sup>24</sup> to stamp its multi-racial, multicultural, and cosmopolitan credentials. Römer collocates the emergence of YHWH as the God of Israel-Judah and all nations via textual additions and reconfigurations of the identity of YHWH as God in the Torah.<sup>25</sup>

The prophecy of Is 61:1-2 enlarges justice issues and the obligation for intervention or visit of God to include proclamation of the good news, binding up of broken hearted, liberation from captivities and prisons, and the savour of God's beneficence. This prophetic agenda was taken up by Luke in his inaugural speech in the synagogue in Capernaum (Lk 4:18-19) with the addition of healthcare needs as justice issues – "recovery of sight for the blind". The shifting goal post and the changing boundary of justice issues the Bible enunciates enables every generation to discern and add extra justice issues to its toolkit of contexts for intervention in the name of justice.

It is important to note that Luke is the only Gospel that takes up the salvific understanding of the visit of God (Ex 3:16) in two places in the New Testament: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has **visited** (*epeskepsato*) and redeemed his

people . . . because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall **visit** (*episkepsetai*) us from on high" and " 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has **visited** (*epsekepsato*) his people'" (Lk 7:16). Besides continuing with the visit of God as intervention for salvation, Lk 7:11-16 includes economics in justice issues. The poverty of the widow of Nain and her prospective destitution at the death of her only son leads to Jesus' visit/intervention to restore her son back to her to forestall a crashing poverty from befalling her.

The whole idea behind this section is to argue that biblical justice issues ties together identity formation and justice. For justice to be biblical and Christian, it must aim at the eradication of differences, and it must take its cue from God. It follows that the "age of justice" is a Christian religious missionary vision of evangelization that implicates the obligation to guarantee justice and common identity. This identity, as we will see with Paul, has dual citizenship – heavenly and earthly.

### 3. The Great Commission of Matt 28: 16-20

If the visit of God is construed in salvific terms and the making of a united human identity as children of God, Munachi Ezeogu's reinterpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 from a literal exegesis focuses on the identity formation purposes of the Matthean "Great Commission" text. He reads the purpose of the Great Commission as the mission of incorporating non-Jews into the community of the redeemed, since Matthew's gospel is known for its preference for Jewish tendencies. According to Ezeogu:

Matthew 28:16-20 has traditionally been read as a programmatic text to establish Christian belief and praxis, such as baptism, the Trinitarian doctrine, and above all, world mission. This study seeks to uncover the literal sense of the text, which should guide its practical appropriations . . . Positively, the thesis proposes a new model for reading Matthew 28:16-20 not as establishing Gentile

---

MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Publishing Company, 1999, 145-161; Baruch Halpern, "YHWH the Revolutionary: Reflections on the Rhetoric of Redistribution in the Social Context of Dawning Monotheism", in Alice Ogden Bellis (ed.), *Jews, Christians, and the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, (SBL symposium series 8), Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000, 179-212; Thomas Römer, "The Problem of the Hexateuch" in Jan C. Gertz, Bernard M. Levinson, et al. (eds.), *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2016, 813-827.

<sup>24</sup> James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament*, New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2006, 3.

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas Römer, "La naissance du Pentateuque et la construction d'une identité en débat", in *L'identité dans l'Écriture, Hommage au professeur Jacques Briand* (Olivier Artus et de Joëlle Ferry (Eds.), Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2009, 21-43.

mission but as a magisterial commissioning whose intent is to authorize the admission of Gentiles to the teaching office of Matthew's Jewish Christian church.<sup>26</sup>

Ezeogu's reinterpretation of the Great Commission squares with justice issues because evangelization emphasizes the visit of God as incorporation of all and sundry into membership of the children of God. The Great Commission cosmopolitanizes the identity of the children of God to include everybody, not just the Jews. By extension,

3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus".<sup>27</sup>

The cry for justice that is ubiquitous today restructures status, gender and racial inequalities Paul suggests Christianity and its missionary endeavours should put an end to. He puts forward the unity of humanity in a universal adoption as children of God: "because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying,



despite the "changing landscape of religious missionary life", evangelization remains an imperative of inclusive identity making for all missionary endeavours.

#### 4. The Triple Identity Reconciliation of Justice Issues in Galatians

The configuration of human identity as the children of God inaugurated in Exodus gets a boost in Galatians. The new depiction of a united and universal human identity in the expression "#metoo" evokes the need to consolidate on the triple strata of reconciliations Paul underscores in Galatians

"Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6).

The preoccupation of our age of justice issues calls upon all peoples to recognise and construct one humanity with respect for everybody's dignity, race, culture, gender, etc. As far as missionaries are concerned, their unique intervention in justice issues is based on faith and springs from the imitation of a God of justice, who visited for salvation and justice in the Hebrew Scripture and continued the justice intervention in his Son in the New Testament.

<sup>26</sup> Ernest Munachi Ezeogu, *The Purpose of the Great Commission: A Historical-critical Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation submitted to St. Michael College, University of Toronto, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Gourgues, "'Ni Juif ni Grec, ni esclave ni libre, ni mâle et femelle' (Ga 3,28). Sur une contribution de la première génération chrétienne à une affirmation des droits humains", *Science et Esprit* 69/2, 2017, 241-262.



#### 4.1 Baptism as an Element of Identity (Gal 3:26-29)

The grammatical change from “we”, first person plural, to “you”, second person plural, entrenches the purpose of Paul’s tortuous arguments from Gal 3:1-25, as well as shifts the focus of identity definition away from himself (Gal 2:18-21) to the Galatians (Gal 3:26-29). Here, the concepts of “justification”, “cross” and “law” are absent; other nomenclature (baptism, Abraham, sons [children], etc.) replaces them. The point this section underscores is the cumulative nature of Paul’s identity debate; there are more arguments to substantiate Paul’s claim to identity hybridity, besides those enumerated in Gal 2.

Pauline scholarship considers “in Christ”<sup>28</sup> a formula with a precise content and utilization. It takes for granted the Christ-event as an aggregating reality. It incorporates the idea of the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, among other existential elements of the life of Jesus Christ. In this context, “if you belong to Christ” (Gal 3:29) adds to the meaning of “in Christ” (Gal 3:26) as its pre-condition. The conditional clause, “if”, makes “in Christ” a factual state that makes possible the partitive or genitive statement “of Christ” about Christ. Consequently, it underscores the status of Galatians as being grafted unto Christ.

The formulation, “Christ Jesus”, that makes Christ precede Jesus focuses attention on the Messianism of Jesus. The hermeneutic principle of promise-fulfillment comes to play in that apposite taxonomy – Christ Jesus. The intertextuality of Paul’s arguments

demonstrates the congruities between the Messiah promised and the bearer of the name Christ Jesus. That Paul dispenses with “Jesus”, that is in apposition to Christ, underscores the emphasis on “Christ”. This exclusion of Jesus in “if you are of Christ” is in order to make Christ the focal point of adjunction to Abraham as the “promised one” of old (Gal 3:16), as the capstone of his argument regarding Abraham’s link to Christ Jesus and Christians.

#### 4.2 Identity Nomenclature – Heirs and Children

The titles of “heirs” and “children” that Paul argues for in Gal 3:26-29 cannot be separated from Paul’s argument begun in Gal 3:1. Baptism provides the source of the identity change from its Old Testament bases (Gal 3:7, 16) to the Christ-event (Gal 3:26-29). The declarative statement, “you are children of God”, followed by a dependent prepositional clause, “through faith”, provides two supplementary arguments to the nomenclature “heirs” and “children”. First, Paul correlates (partitive) “belong to Christ” and being “in Christ” with faith in God. Second, Paul correlates “heir to the promise”, the link with the Old Testament (Gal 3:7, 16) with “children of God”, the present situation Paul defends (Gal 3:26).

The diachronic relevance of “God” and “faith” fulfills the requirement of promise-fulfillment biblical hermeneutics and the continuity between God and the works of his Messiah. Paul makes the children of God of today, the heirs of God, according to the plans of God (Gal 3:8-9) in the Old Testament, where Abraham himself was justified based on faith (Gal 3:6), just as God’s children are justified by faith now (Gal 3:26). God and faith are the strings that unite the work of God in the present “in Christ Jesus” with the promises of the past. By implication, whether called an “heir” or a “child”, both titles have the same referent – every human being. God no longer permits for status and racial differences among human beings because they are all his children, notwithstanding the nomenclatural

<sup>28</sup> I favor the position of Bouttier on this issue for two reasons: first, he successfully counteracted the reading of “religionsgeschichte schule” group’s claim that “en Christō” means a “sphere of influence” reminiscent of mystery religions; second, he connects “en Christō” to the meaning of the Christian life, in a sequel to his book “En Christō”. See Michel Bouttier, *En Christ: Étude d’exégèse et de théologie paulinienne*, Paris: PUF, 1962, pp. 5-30; Ibid, *La condition chrétienne selon saint Paul*, Genève: Labor et Fides, 1964, p. 1 footnote 1.

usage.

### 4.3 Baptism Confers A Universal Human Identity

The identity appellatives verse 28 conjures are co-extensive with the formula “into Christ”. The phraseology “you were baptized into Christ” expresses “motion” of incorporation or aggregation. The indefinite quantitative pronoun “hosoi” implies that a limitless number of people can be incorporated into Christ by the medium of the ritual of Baptism. From what history teaches us about baptism, at the time and now, it bears a public character and an expressive articulation of belief. This surmises the context for the public profession of faith in Christ Jesus, as the demonstration of the act of incorporation and self-definition/identity referent<sup>29</sup> from the reality of the Christ-event. With the figure of Abraham that looms large behind Jewish identity definition is juxtaposed the “Seed” to correlate Christ and the descendants of Abraham. The Christ into whom a limitless number of people are incorporated, through baptism, is the same as the “Seed” of Abraham that was promised (Gal 3:19) and who has come in Christ Jesus. Implicitly, instead of the circumcision that makes one a descendant of Abraham, baptism substitutes for it to make people God’s children through Abraham’s offspring – Christ.

A lesson not to be missed here is the emphasis on the descriptive formulae of Christians’ “graftedness” unto Christ. First, they are a part of Christ or the partitive formula; second, “in Christ Jesus”/ “put on Christ” or the existential formula; finally, the ritual/baptismal formula “into Christ”. The complementarities among these formulae preclude “mythologization” of the history of religion school. One way “faith”, as vertical union with God, manifests itself is in the human gesture of appropriation of identity through the acceptance of the ritual of baptism.

If identity definition pitted Paul against Peter (Gal 2:15), the role of identity as a force for existential unity, in place of division, is the core of Paul’s argument in verse 28. Paul’s appropriation of the trito-Isaiah (Is 61:10) concept of “cloth” (v. 27) as a sign of a new identity of oneness (v. 28) strengthens his imagery of baptism as symbol of unity, because it confers a new identity of oneness for the many (*hosoi*) who receive it. The notion that Christ is the cloth they all put on precludes multiplicity of identities and suggests uniqueness and inclusiveness of the identity that comes by faith in Christ.

The grammatical import of the aorist “enedusasthe” (v. 27), an action that takes place once and defines the future, corroborates identity conferment with the baptismal event, whose impact on those who went through it is the subject of Paul’s identity hermeneutics. If Paul uses the grammatical present, “you are one”, with the addition of “in Christ”, he sets up an ideal (“in Christ”) in quest of existential concretization or actualization (“you are one”). It is exactly because the existential horizontal reality of oneness was lacking that it led to Peter’s and Paul’s altercation and necessitated the hermeneutical demonstration of the Christian identity formation. This implies that the religious ideal occasioned by “in Christ” requires human project for its existential realization.

The dyads, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female”, have a dual function. First, their enumeration speaks to the stratification of the society and community of Paul, even if the strict preoccupation of Paul is the dyad “Jew and Greek”,<sup>30</sup> because of the unique identity issue engendered by table fellowship (Gal 2:12). Second, the verb “*eneimi*”, in its classical usage, “*eni*”, references “in Christ”, and the existentially incongruent reality of

<sup>29</sup> The link between baptism and identity is underscored in verse 28.

<sup>30</sup> See Ayodele AYENI, *The Antithesis “Neither Jew nor Greek” in Gal 3:28a: Its Context, Application, Meaning and Origin*, Frankfurt: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012.

the day and time of Paul – social stratification.

The social stratification references the first two sets of dyads – “Jew or Greek” and “slave or free”. These are nurtured stratifications. As for “male and female”, nature or creation is its origin. The implications of baptism, then, is two-fold: to understand gender division from the complementarity of nature, in God’s scheme of things, while poised to eradicate the differences human beings have nurtured (“there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free”). Consequently, Paul’s identity argument respects the order of creation and not nurture. The fact that Paul retains the different roles of males (father/son) and females (mother) – “God sent his Son, born of a woman . . . crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:4, 6) – supports my position.

The religious and faith reality created by “in Christ” encourages those in Christ to engage in the eradication of nurtured differences at different levels of social cadre, gender, racial, religious, status, national, etc. The fact that Paul engages Peter with the hermeneutic of identity is already a positive step for all generations, for them to add their own bit to the project of one identity defense. Besides the physical ritual of baptism as an element of identity, there is a spiritual element as well. To this spiritual element or the Holy Spirit, we now turn. Lest we forget, this means that Paul reclaims God’s prerogative in identity definition against human or nurtured identity separation.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.4 Holy Spirit as an Element of Identity (Gal 4:4-7)

“The promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14) Paul mentions earlier garners attention after the arrival of Christ/faith (Gal 3:23-25). The clearest articulation of “time”, for theological purposes, in Galatians, is in Gal 4:4-5. These verses correlate, on the one hand, the divine perspectives on identity –

“God”, “his Son” and “time”; on the other, “time” implicates human beings – “woman”, “law” and “adoption of children” in God’s application of time to human affairs. Paul reconciles the divine and the human elements in God’s paternity – “Abba! Father!” It is at the juncture of God’s paternity of humanity that identity takes its new meaning via the Holy Spirit.

The concept of time has been subject of articles<sup>32</sup> and books;<sup>33</sup> none of these cited writings correlates time and identity; rather, they either attempt to correct the incorrect use of the concept of “time” (James Barr and Pidoux) or they preoccupy themselves with the semantics of “time” (Gourgues and Dumais) and its modernist twist (Peter Eicher). My interest is to delineate the functionality of the reality created by “God”, “his Son” and “time” on Paul’s mission of identity awareness campaign in the letter to the Galatians.

In the quest for logic, I take Gal 4:4-5 as the micro-context within the macro-context of Gal 4:1-7. The thematic shift from Abraham (Gal 3:29) to the discussion of the second dyad of Gal 3:28b (free person and slave) is a pretext for arguing that Gal 4:1 begins a new argument; hence, it serves as a point of delimitation for the macro-context of our pericope (Gal 4:1-7). And the change from

<sup>32</sup> Peter Eicher, “Temporalisation de l’éternité: Le Seigneur du temps et l’origine de la modernité” in *Temps et eschatology. Données bibliques et problématiques contemporaines* ed., Jean-Louis Leuba, Paris: Cerf, 1994, pp. 215-234; Michel Gourgues, “La ‘plénitude des temps’: Polysémie d’une formule néotestamentaire (Mc 1,15; Ga 4,4; Ep 1,10)” in *En ce temps-là: Conceptions et expériences bibliques du temps* eds., Michel Gourgues et Michel Talbot, Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2002, pp. 113-135; Marcel Dumais, “L’événement eschatologique et le temps: Jalons herméneutique” in *En ce temps-là: Conceptions et expériences bibliques du temps*, pp. 89-111; G. Pidoux, “À propos de la notion biblique du temps”, *Revue Théologique et Philosophique* 2, 1952, pp. 120-125.

<sup>33</sup> James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, Studies in Biblical Theology 33, London: SCM Press, 1962; Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, London: (publisher not indicated), 1951; John Marsh, *The Fullness of Time* (New York, N. Y.: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952.

<sup>31</sup> The two “missions” (Gal 4:4, 6), of the Son of God and of the Spirit of the Son of God, speak more about this.

human slaves and their eventual adoption as children (Gal 4:7) to the discussion of “enslavement to gods” (Gal 4:8) makes Gal 4:1-7 a new pericope,<sup>34</sup> with verse 7 as the end of it.

Firstly, the concept of “time” clarifies the meaning of the “heir presumptive” of Gal 4:1. The correlation between an “infant heir” (Gal 4:1) and an “heir through God” (Gal 4:7) indicates two roles played by “time”. “Time” changes the conception of a legal<sup>35</sup> action – since adoption law – and sets up a new set of relationship by the conferment of a new identity – “heir through God” (Gal 4:7). As a legal infant heir, the power of inheritance was postponed, and a certain portion of “time” must pass before its actualization. The “heirship” at stake is not goods or material possession to be acquired, without precluding those, but identity naturalization as a “child” or adoption/identity conferment.

The assertion of Gal 4:7 suggests that “sonship” has replaced “heirship” because of God. God leads to the actualization of “time” and assures the identity transformation through the Holy Spirit. By implication, the state of “slavery” is the absence of God’s intervention in the concept of time. But how did God impact time, to achieve the transformation of the identity of an infant heir into a son? This question is important because of the debate around Paul’s dual heritage (Jewish and Greek legal concepts) apparent in Galatians.<sup>36</sup>

According to time phrase “until the appointed time” (Gal 4:2), the “infant heir” suffers a “time” constraint, set by the father,

before acceding to “sonship”, which is the inheritance he awaits. If this time constraint lasts, the infant heir’s “lordship” overall remains in potency. However, the possession of the “spirit of his Son” (Gal 4:6) provides a proof that the “time set” has elapsed and a new time has begun. The “time” of the Spirit of God’s Son has arrived, which corresponds to the beginning of a new time and the end of the old time.<sup>37</sup> It is pertinent to understand that it is not time-as-a-whole that is changed, but the portion of time in relation to the adoptive requirement!

There are taxonomical mutations between Gal 4:2 and Gal 4:6: the “infant heir” is now replaced by children; “set time” is substituted for by the “Spirit”; and God or “Abba Father” takes over the role of father in-charge of time. One notices that the first level of correlation, when talking about a “slave” and an “heir”, plays out in the divine level first, before incorporating the human level. The legal conditions for adoption cede places to a divine vision of adoption that does not respect human legal conditions – the Spirit. For Paul, the Christ-event is the new parameter for judging identity, because it is by sharing the Spirit of the Son of God that we gain our identity.

Furthermore, the human condition to be changed or transformed is that of “slavery”. The condition for achieving it requires divine intervention. Apparently, human affairs and conditions, without a direct intervention by God, allow for slavery or “identityless” infants. Consequently, becoming “children of God” must be by adoption and as a “gift”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Although “*stoicheion*” links Gal 4:3 to Gal 4:9, the implication of that vocabulary is only made evident in Gal 4:8-11. The role of Gal 4:4-5 provides the reason that overrides the concept of “*stoicheion*”.

<sup>35</sup> “*Klēronomos*” is the legal term for an heir, one who is not a biological child. See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The Irrevocable Will” in Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Keys to Galatians, Collected Essays*, 2788-5533; Marc Rastoin, *Tarse et Jérusalem: La double culture de l’Apôtre Paul en Galates 3:6-4:7*, (ABib 152), Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2003, pp. 180-182.

<sup>36</sup> See Murphy-O’Connor and Rastoin cited.

<sup>37</sup> “A new creation” (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). See Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Two ways to understand “gift” here are legal and God’s magnanimity. In their discussions of the legality of adoption in antiquity, Rastoin and Murphy-O’Connor place the initiative in the adoptor. As for Barclay, the fact that “redemption” precedes adoption, the concept of gift is not far-fetched. In the words of Barclay, “The metaphor of adoption makes clear that ‘sonship’ can come about only through *receiving* a new status and a new identity, as granted by God”.



received from God. This is to say that God circumvents the conditions imposed by “*ta stoicheia*” and proposes an alternative route – the Spirit of his Son. It could be argued that all relating to “*ta stoicheia*” are contrary to God’s designs for human identity conferment or definition. The overthrow of the works of “*ta stoicheia*” is imperative for a new comprehension of time to become evident.

When “time” is construed from the vicissitudes and vagaries of galactic movements or “*ta stoicheia*”, the meaning of “fullness” (*plērōma*) becomes easier to discern (Gal 4:4). Since “the fullness” (to *plērōma*) is used partitively (“of time” – *tou chronou*) of “time” in the expression “to *plērōma tou chronou*”, “completeness/fullness” appears to be a fair translation for “to *plērōma*” in Gal 4:4. The idea of “to *plērōma tou chronou*”, from its context, suggests incompleteness and an anticipation for something to happen, from the verb *erchomai*, but lacks what it takes for its completeness. The complex sentence in which Paul places “to *plērōma tou chronou*”, as a dependent clause (*hote de ēlthen to plērōma tou chronou*), conditions its completion in God’s initiative. It is the action of God as having sent (*exapesteilen*) – an aorist verb that indicates a single action of the past – his Son that completes the meaning of “to *plērōma tou chronou*” and suggests the translation of “to *plērōma*” as “completeness”. Consequently, “arrival” (*erchomai*) makes imperative the comprehension of “time” as being in motion towards its (to *plērōma*) “completeness”.

The partitive importance of (to *plērōma*) becomes obvious in Gal 4:4, because of “redemption” (*exagorasē*) or the lacuna that “completes” time. The subjunctive use of “redemption” (*exagorasē* – “that he might redeem”)<sup>39</sup> demonstrates an aspect of time, not time in its entirety, that needed “completeness”; that is, “time” requires to be

given a new meaning. The attributive use of the “law” to correlate or describe the nature or the kind of “redemption” at stake, the redemption of those “under the law” addresses the specific part (partitive) of time, not the whole of “time”, affected by “to *plērōma tou chronou*” – the transformation of the role or meaning of the “law” of identity or identity definition: that was what was impacted by “to *plērōma tou chronou*”. Identity definition through the law was overtaken by the possession of the Spirit of the Son God as a new index of identity.

#### 4.5 Identity as Physical and Spiritual

The dual origins of the emissary from God (Gal 4:4) pave the way for a new identity, from the union of the human (woman) and the divine (God) in him; a new parameter for defining identity is thereby set forth as human (physical) and divine (spiritual). The time at which God sent his Son was the “completed time” – “to *plērōma tou chronou*”.<sup>40</sup> Prior to this time, the “law” defined human identity. From the “completed time”, when the law no longer defines human identity, the Spirit of God’s Son<sup>41</sup> changed identity requirement to adoption via the possession of the Spirit of the Son of God. This means that, just as Christ shares in the Divine/God as Son and in the woman as human, human beings too share in God, through the Spirit of God’s Son, and in human nature, through human birth. The order of nature or creation is respected (born of a woman) and the Divine order respected (the Spirit of the Son of God).

It follows that the “mission” of God, through his Son, is identity conferment via adoption in his Son. The reality of this adoption, because the Son of God has redeemed humanity puts in place a new mode or

See John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 58; *ibid*, “An Identity Received from God: The Theological Configuration of Paul’s Kinship Discourse,” *Early Christianity* 8, 2017, 354-372.

<sup>39</sup> My literal translation.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian” (Gal 3:24-25).

<sup>41</sup> “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rm 8:2).

channel of adoption in the mission of the Son of God, who is divine and human. What Paul demonstrates in Gal 4:1-7 is God's universal adoption of human beings as his children, through his Son. If God's intent is this universal adoption, Paul makes the creation of the awareness of what God has done his missionary mantra – justification, baptism and Holy Spirit! Identity awareness requires the guidance of the Spirit of the Son of God over that which is natural or physical.

The role of a “woman”, the implication of nature in identity definition, extends the meaning of (*phusis*) nature (*hēmeis phusei Joudaioi* [Gal 2:15]) to humanity, without reservation. Also, the necessity for “redemption” from sin, levels out any difference (*ouk ex ethnōn hamartōloi* [Gal 2:15]) among peoples. God identifies with human beings through his Spirit in them, in addition to their physical component. The arguments of Gal 4:1-7 introduces a divine or spiritual element into the physically stratified human beings of Gal 3:28. Adoption and God's Fatherhood of humanity, through justification, baptism, and the gift of his Son's Spirit, trumps any humanly contrived ethnic definition of human beings and favors identity over ethnicity, sameness over nurtured differences. If the twentieth century society still perpetuates segregation among human beings, it simply means that the ethics of identity has not been sufficiently practiced. Let us explore this indispensable ethics as an integral element of identity in Galatians.

#### 4.6 General Implication

The foundation of religious missionary life is biblically based. The theories of wokeness, cosmopolitanism, secularism, etc. do not condition the approach of religious missionary life's evangelization endeavours. On the contrary, missionary enterprises bring to bear the good news of God's intervention in human history to bring about reconciliatory salvation among all the divides that put human beings at loggerhead – status, race, gender, etc.

Galatians synthesizes the reconciliation of humanity – Jews, Greeks, slave, free persons, male and female – achieved at the expense of the blood of Christ and the reconciled identity as God's children that ensures from it. The justice quest of humanity, under the auspices of #metoo, calls for the primordial justice of God to intervene and rid the world of injustices. The Holy Spirit invites religious missionaries today to engage with emerging justice issues for a better world.

#### Conclusion

“The ‘Visit of God’ (Ex 3:16) and Paul's Missiology as Identity formation in Galatians” provide twofold recipes for “The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life”: firstly, it names our age the “age of justice” to provide a cognitive context for missionary engagement with the world of today. The implication of this is that it proposes that God and Jesus Christ are champions of the “age of justice” because they have left us a legacy of interventions or visits of salvation to imitate in our “age of justice”. Secondly, religious missionary life today should engage “wokeness” and all the variants of freedom in vogue from the Christian identity that Paul describes for it to be Christian and worthy of promotion by religious missionaries.

The consciousness of injustice must characterise religious missionary's relations with the world to discover new areas of intervention besides those already outlined in the Bible. The plights of the aged, migrants, children and the evangelization of social media are instances needing creative intervention to bring about the visit of God by missionaries. As the list of the zones of intervention enlarges, trust in the Lord of the harvest will lead missionaries through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to remain relevant to every age up until the end of time!

Marian Murcia, SFB

## “El cambiante panorama de la vida religiosa misionera”

### Reflexiones Y Preguntas en Torno a Las Finanzas Y la Gestion Economica en Tiempos de Disminucion

#### Desafíos y retos que tenemos que afrontar



Vamos a comenzar nuestra reflexión partiendo del marco de referencia teórico de la experiencia transformativa, este marco va a guiar nuestra reflexión partiendo de los cuatro ámbitos de la experiencia: el contexto, las

personas, el sistema y el ámbito de la fe, estos cuatro elementos nos servirán de enfoque de nuestra mirada.

#### 1. Una mirada al contexto global de VUCA a BANI<sup>1</sup>

A lo largo del tiempo se han ido desarrollando en el marco de las teorías del pensamiento diferentes modelos que nos permitan entender mejor el contexto global en el que nos encontramos. Los seres humanos buscamos describir la realidad con un lenguaje que nos permita simplificarla, entenderla y que nos ayude a extraer información del entorno.

En tiempos de turbulencias, surgen los conceptos VUCA y BANI que tienen algo en común, ambos paradigmas son representaciones simplificadas de la realidad con el objetivo de

comprender mejor el contexto en el que vivimos, esto es, nuestro entorno.

Para analizar la realidad de los miembros y de los sistemas (congregaciones /institutos) partíamos hasta hace poco del modelo del entorno VUCA que se define de modo sintético como:

- V de Volátil (*volatile*): entendido como un entorno cambiante, poco predecible, en el que los sucesos se producen a una velocidad enorme.
- U de Incierto (*uncertain*): entendido como la imposibilidad de saber a ciencia cierta los cambios que se van a producir aun con altos niveles de conocimiento. Consecuencia inevitable de la volatilidad del cambio.
- C de Complejo (*complex*): producido por la confusión de los cambios. No somos capaces de presidir lo que ocurre y ello nos hace sentirnos desinformados. Debemos gestionar la complejidad en un entorno de incertidumbre.
- A de Ambiguo (*ambiguous*): entendido como falta de claridad. La falta de capacidad de predicción hace que se vislumbren muchos escenarios sin consenso.

Muchos estudiosos comienzan a ver el modelo VUCA como obsoleto, vislumbrando la necesidad de sustituirlo, se ve como *insuficiente* y requiere incorporar nuevos elementos que complementen el modelo conceptual con el que nos aproximamos a la realidad.

Hoy comenzamos a hablar de BANI. Debido al caos generado por la pandemia en el mundo, en

---

<sup>1</sup> Aitana González  
Experta en estrategia digital y transformación  
Openwebinars

2020 coge fuerza un nuevo concepto. En un momento en el que la situación global cambia se requiere de nuevas herramientas o conceptos que nos ayuden a encontrar sentido a la realidad. Modelos que simplifiquen el contexto y nos permitan definir las respuestas adecuadas en un mundo incontrolable.

Como en el caso de VUCA, para entender el concepto hay que acudir a las siglas que forman el acrónimo. Por los términos en inglés: B de frágil, A de ansiedad, N de no lineal e I de incomprensible.

- **B de Frágil o quebradizo (*brittle*)** Es consecuencia de las brechas causadas por esa volatilidad del entorno anterior. El contexto se ha vuelto cada vez más quebradizo y, por tanto, frágil, ya que en cualquier momento puede romperse. Esto es, los sistemas sociales y económicos se han visto *machados* por los diferentes sucesos mundiales y son, hoy en día, más débiles de lo que aparentan. Si miramos profundo, dichos sistemas pueden romperse en cualquier momento, incluso aquellos que parecen más fuertes. La B de BANI también va unida a un concepto de entorno no elástico. Nuestra realidad es rígida, los sistemas son más estáticos de lo que deberían y por tanto nos reduce la capacidad de adaptarnos, nuestra resiliencia.
- **A de Ansiedad (*anxious*)** Un contexto volátil y poco predecible y, que además, experimenta síntomas de fragilidad ante cualquier suceso, genera agitación en los componentes de los sistemas sociales. Un aura de inquietud y zozobra nos rodea. Esta ansiedad además se ve incrementada por la sensación de impotencia que viven los individuos o las instituciones, incapaces de generar un resultado cambiante y que realmente tenga un valor en el entorno. Cualquier solución que pongamos, se verá como incorrecta, ya que vivimos nuestro día a día con agitación. Esta A de ansiedad también está generada por haber intentado acercar el futuro al presente, buscando soluciones muy rápidas a los problemas, intentando *correr demasiado*. Ello nos ha hecho sentirnos inseguros, acrecentando la incertidumbre. El peligro no es la ansiedad

en sí, sino el miedo que genera y el peligro de que dicha sensación de impotencia se convierta en pasividad.

- **N de no lineal (*non linear*)** Estamos acostumbrados a vivir en un mundo complejo (C de VUCA). Si bien, cada vez es más patente que la relación causa-efecto, aunque pueda llegar a ser secuencial, desde luego no es inmediata y eso nos trastorna. Nos genera una sensación de incoherencia porque no logramos ver la relación de causalidad al no estar cerca la causa de la consecuencia. Un entorno no lineal nos produce desequilibrio. Ese desfase temporal entre el origen y la consecuencia nos desestabiliza. Al no estar unido el efecto a la causa, las consecuencias nos sorprenden, las experimentamos como desproporcionadas. Ello nos genera sentido de urgencia contribuyendo aún más a la sensación de ansiedad.
- **I de incomprensible (*incomprehensible*)** VUCA era ambiguo y esa ambigüedad del entorno es lo que lo hace incomprensible. Es ilógico y no podemos entender lo que ocurre. No sigue los patrones habituales y nos hace sentir que no tenemos la suficiente capacidad de entendimiento. Y, aun con información adicional que podamos obtener, no parece que sea suficiente para comprender la entera magnitud de todo lo que ocurre.

A todos nos afecta esta cambio en la situación actual y entender el contexto es clave para poder interpretar la realidad y lo que nos está ocurriendo. Cuanto más pequeño sea el grupo más dificultades encuentra para adaptarse a la realidad cambiante, reaccionar con rapidez y agilidad y esto no es algo que caracterice a las congregaciones religiosas. Por otra parte, cuesta prever, programar, vislumbrar un futuro que está cargado de incertidumbre, y que nos parece a todos cada vez más incomprensible, a veces tenemos la sensación de que nada es como nos imaginábamos hace muy pocos años.

Los últimos años han estado marcado por la pandemia, el COVID ha cambiado nuestro modo de mirar la realidad, la guerra de Ucrania en esta parte del mundo ha venido a desestabilizar la economía euro, a generar de nuevo un ambiente de guerra fría que cuesta



comprender y que tiene consecuencias económicas muy importantes (pérdidas en inversiones, alta inflación...)

En términos generales, podemos decir que es necesario definir **estrategias a corto plazo**. Las estrategias a largo plazo ya no tienen sentido puesto que la realidad nos impide garantizar la toma de decisiones con información completa y con una evaluación adecuada de los datos y a la vida religiosa esto nos cuesta, en general nos lleva mucho tiempo tener toda la información para tomar una decisión y cuando la tomamos el mundo y la realidad nos indican que ya no tiene validez. (Ejemplo: fondos de inversión de largo plazo a corto, tipos de interés muy cambiantes y atractivos a corto....)

**Podemos preguntarnos ¿Cómo afecta este cambio de modelo a nuestro cambiante panorama en la vida religiosa misionera? ¿Tenemos en cuenta el contexto mundial cuando tomamos decisiones sobre la misión?**

## **2. Una mirada a los recursos humanos: LAS PERSONAS**

Nos encontramos por una parte con la **DISMINUCION DEL NUMERO de miembros**...ya no tenemos las vocaciones que teníamos, el número anual de fallecimientos es en general superior al de los nuevos ingresos en la mayoría de las congregaciones. Además **DEL ENVEJECIMIENTO DE SUS MIEMBROS**, sobre todo en algunos países, donde la media de edad de los miembros es muy elevada y la fragilidad y las necesidades de cuidado muy altas.

La media de edad de muchas de nuestras congregaciones en este hemisferio está entre los 80- 85 años mientras que en muchos países “de misión” es de 30-35 años... además nos encontramos con el **DESEQUILIBRIO entre diferentes realidades**, en las zonas geográficas de Europa, América, Oceanía... encontramos miembros envejecidos, sin vocaciones desde hace muchos años, pero es donde se encuentra la mayor parte de los recursos materiales que posee la congregación, a veces, difíciles de gestionar. Y en zonas de África y Asia, emergentes en cuanto a número de miembros, pero con dificultades económicas presentes y futuras muy importantes. Inestabilidad política y económica del propio país, situaciones de conflicto.

Este desequilibrio viene dado por LA FALTA DE VOCACIONES en general en determinadas áreas del mundo y por la aceptación de nuevas vocaciones en algunos países como si esto fuese una solución de futuro para la congregación. Pero nos estamos preguntando **¿cómo vamos a afrontar el futuro de estas realidades emergentes a nivel económico?**

Otra variable para tener en cuenta además del número y que tiene un impacto en el futuro la formación: LA FORMACION RECIBIDA O LA CARENCIA DE FORMACION EN TODO LO RELACIONADO CON LA ECONOMIA, FINANZAS Y GESTION de la institución. En general, y más aun en las congregaciones femeninas, hemos dedicado pocos medios o no los suficientes a la formación de los miembros: somos pocas, no tenemos recursos suficientes... y ahora esta falta de formación cuando las situaciones son cada vez más complejas nos hace sentir más indefensas y vulnerables para afrontar los grandes retos que se nos presentan.

## **3. Una mirada al SISTEMA, al grupo**

**El Liderazgo** a todos los niveles es otra de las fragilidades que encontramos en muchas congregaciones e Institutos. Con frecuencia personas de buena voluntad pero con pocas habilidades de liderazgo y a veces con muchos límites de edad, con poca **capacidad para dar un giro a cualquier situación de forma rápida y eficaz**. Utilizan sus competencias para tomar las decisiones más acertadas posibles, pero siempre, asociadas a seguridades, a caminos conocidos y en muchas ocasiones carentes de creatividad.

Personas con un recto sentido de la pobreza, la austeridad, la economía, pero con pocas habilidades para la gestión ... es muy frecuente escuchar cuando hablamos de estos temas que no somos una empresa pero en realidad manejamos patrimonios inmobiliarios, inversiones, obras y centros de trabajo con personal laboral que se parecen más a una multinacional que a una congregación cuya finalidad es la evangelización y que nacieron en situaciones de extrema carencia y de confianza en la providencia...

**LOS RECURSOS MATERIALES**, hablemos de ellos

Los **Ingresos**: Salarios y pensiones la mayor parte de los ingresos en las congregaciones en función de las zonas geográficas son las pensiones de jubilación. Los salarios se han reducido, ya que, en las obras propias o ajenas, la mayoría ya no estamos en edad laboral. Y en las zonas en las que los recursos humanos son más jóvenes los puestos de trabajo escasean o no son remunerados. Esto genera otro de los fuertes desequilibrios: el económico al interior del sistema/grupo

**Los Gastos**: el envejecimiento de los miembros y el coste que suponen los cuidados de este grupo de edad. Empresas externas que realizan las tareas que durante muchos años nosotras mismas hemos realizado. Además, los gastos de **formación**: necesidad de dedicar recursos a la formación en los lugares sobre todo donde no hay recursos propios para poder hacer frente a este gasto, apostar por el futuro es apostar por una formación sólida.

**Los Inmuebles: USO Y VALOR.** Abordamos aquí el dilema, los inmuebles que tenemos en algunas partes del mundo con un alto valor de mercado pero con muchos gastos de mantenimiento, impuestos y medio vacíos si bien poseen un alto potencial cuando están bien gestionados.

Inmuebles que por su uso podemos dividir: para la vida de las comunidades, otros con uso de obras, misión, apostolados y un tercer grupo que son los que a veces están vacíos. Una buena gestión de los inmuebles conlleva poner estos bienes, en alquiler y que se podrían destinar a generar beneficios futuros que ayudaran a mantener la sostenibilidad económica de la congregación. Por otra parte nos encontramos que necesitamos construir inmuebles por la expansión y el crecimiento en algunas zonas de misión pero que luego cuesta mantener.

#### **Los Fondos Y Reservas Para El Futuro Y La Capacidad Para Gestionarlos**

Aquí nos encontramos otra de las fragilidades, la carencia de fondos suficientes o la dificultad de realizar una óptima gestión de estos. Obras propias que generan una situación de déficit permanente, gastos comunitarios cada vez mayores, gastos de formación, gastos para el cuidado de los mayores....

Y aquí al igual que en el liderazgo la falta de formación para la administración de bienes es una carencia importante en muchas congregaciones. Con frecuencia improvisamos o cedemos la gestión a personas de fuera sin poder establecer por nuestra parte mecanismos de control suficientes.

#### **4. Una mirada desde la FE**

Estamos llamados a mirar la realidad con los ojos de Dios y también nuestra realidad congregacional, misionera, de vida religiosa y a encontrar respuestas en medio de esta realidad cambiante y a veces incomprensible.

**APOSTOLADO Y EXPANSION MISION-ERA**, la misión es el núcleo de nuestra razón de ser y existir como congregación. Algunas veces vamos cerrando obras en lugares donde hemos permanecemos 100 o 150 años, otras veces permanecemos, pero nos resistimos a cambiar y la misión se oscurece y se va apagando lentamente en nuestro horizonte. A veces arriesgamos y seguimos con proyectos de colaboración mucho más allá de nuestra fragilidad...

Pero cuando hablamos de finanzas y misión el reto que esto nos presenta es como hacer sostenible la misión, como podemos proyectar los recursos para poder garantizar la misión en los próximos 10, 20 o 50 años. Y mi pregunta es **¿Cuándo hablamos de sostenibilidad lo hacemos pensando en nosotros, en los miembros o en los proyectos? ¿Cómo compaginar ambos aspectos?**

Algunas **POSIBLES RESPUESTAS** que a veces parece que no brotan de nuestra fe sino de la ausencia de ella. Nuestra mirada al futuro partiendo de nuestra realidad presente nos invita a varias opciones y cada una de ellas debe ir acompañada de un modo diferente de entender y ejercer la gestión económica de la congregación.

- **Seguir esperando**: vendrán tiempos mejores, vocaciones de otros continentes, laicos comprometidos... Hacer pequeños cambios exteriores, seguimos como siempre solo cambia el perfil de nuestra administración. Pero mientras tanto se apaga la vida y la esperanza

- **Buscar alianzas, una búsqueda activa de respuestas:** somos pocos, pero si nos unimos podremos ser más fuertes, buscar alianzas, uniones, fusiones con carismas afines en proyectos comunes. Algunas veces unimos fragilidades, pero por un tiempo resultan validas.
- **Buscar la transformación,** un cambio profundo que empiece desde el interior de cada uno de nosotros y que necesita ser traspasado a los sistemas y estructuras que manejamos.
- Y en algunos casos optar por vivir en clave de Resurrección, es decir vivir el final desde la óptica de la **MISION CUMPLIDA**.

### **VULNERABILIDAD COMPARTIDA...**

El cambiante panorama de la vida religiosa misionera nos está ayudando a sentirnos pequeñas, frágiles, vulnerables y podría ser la puerta de entrada para el cambio. Debemos tener el coraje de afrontar la situación y preguntarnos **¿Qué quiere Dios hoy de nosotras, de nuestras pequeñas o grandes congregaciones?**

No es fácil saber lo que quiere Dios, pero a veces es más fácil enumerar lo que intuimos que parece no querer, no quiere que sigamos reproduciendo esquemas del pasado, ni quiere que volvamos a la normalidad de una vida religiosa caducada, al siempre se hizo así ... no

quiere vernos agotadas, exhaustas buscando soluciones que no generan vida

Nos quiere abiertas, en espíritu de discernimiento para buscar las mejores respuestas compartiendo nuestra vulnerabilidad y arriesgando, buscando juntas, en dialogo y comunión

Y sobre todo creo que quiere que nuestra capacidad financiera, de gestión, nuestros bienes se pongan al servicio de una economía circular, economía del don, de comunión.

Para reflexionar:

- Cuando pienso en el FUTURO DE LA MISION Y EN EL CAMBIANTE PANORAMA DE LA VIDA RELIGIOSA ¿qué sentimiento brota en mi? ¿Qué preocupación aflora de manera más inmediata?
- ¿Qué necesitamos soltar, dejar ir, desprendernos de... para que podamos aceptar la fragilidad, la vulnerabilidad y el tiempo que estamos viviendo en la vida religiosa como un don para la misión?
- ¿Qué intuimos que está emergiendo, brotando, naciendo en estos tiempos como signo del Espíritu para un nuevo modelo de organización- administración para la misión al interior de cada Congregación? ¿Cómo sería ese nuevo modelo y qué características le asignamos?





## **Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life**

### **Formation and Vowed Life**

I wish to begin this contribution by expressing my gratitude to the Executive of SEDOS, organizers of this workshop, for inviting me to share my reflections on this topic. Vatican II called us, religious, many years ago to look at the 'signs of the times'. In numerous articles over the past number of years there have been analyses of what has been, what is now occurring and what the future of religious life might be. Of course, history gives us some bearing as we navigate our individual and collective journey as religious. Mission is at the heart of the Church. The world is changing dramatically and religious life is changing alongside it. If religious life is to be understood today, what transpired yesterday must be seen and used as a point of reference. So, these changes determine how we motivate and animate for mission in the local Churches where we live and work. The topic I have been asked to reflect on is very broad. Thankfully, aspects of the topic have been dealt with by previous presenters. This paper will discuss some aspects of this Changing Landscape, the vows and the place of formation in ensuring the ability of members to adapt to these changing times. It is my opinion that integral and holistic formation of younger members could ensure the quality of religious life and efficacy of our missionary religious life.

#### **The Changing Landscape of Missionary Religious Life**

The most fundamental issue of the changing landscape, in my opinion, is God – our relationship and concept of God. Worthy of note is that Europe was mainly Christian and lived out the Christian values. This landscape has changed and one senses a certain hostility towards the Catholic Church now in the light of this down turn of events. This has resulted to a change in the role of the Church in the society. Furthermore, there is a sense of absence of religion in the public square. Consequently, it is

difficult to share the good news in a system that is becoming increasingly secular. It is my understanding that religious life is about giving priority to God. But

where God is only minimally in the picture, what can we do? This is a question to be faced with candour and sobriety.

Another changing landscape is a passage from a spirituality that was nourished by certain devotions (novenas) to one that is grounded either exclusively on the Word of God and the liturgy or to other spiritualities. Some faculties of theology in the Global North are being shut down for lack of enrolment. The aging population of theologians also puts some pressure in the field as there appears to be very few successors among the younger generation. It is praiseworthy to note that many lay people are now studying theology and most of these are fine theologians.

An increasing problem in Western Europe, North America etc. is the decreasing number of religious. Today, for many religious, the future is insecure and uncertain, thus the survival of religious life is in doubt. They have seen their houses close, sisters leave, their congregation amalgamate, their numbers dwindle, the apostolic work to which they had dedicated their lives are being handed over to Trusts.

Religious women, in a patriarchal Church, more and more have to negotiate its relationship with the local Church. Previously, religious women tended to think almost exclusively in terms of the Church as universal. Today, Schools, Hospitals started by missionaries belong to the





Church. Funding formation of newer members has become a challenge.

Information technology has revolutionised the way we communicate.

The expanded understanding of Mission *ad gentes/ad extra* is another example. This puts into question the ‘especially for Africa’ dimension of some of our charisms. In the 1870s the focus of the Society of African Missions and the Sisters of our Lady of Apostles was very clearly ‘Africa’ and not just ‘Africa’ but a very defined part of Africa allocated by Propaganda Fide. Today, the field of mission, the landscape of that reality has changed and there is need for evangelization and re-evangelization of all continents.

Most religious congregations were founded in order to carry out a series of services for which there was a widely felt need but which the government did not provide for example, health care, education etc. The early missionaries arrived in the then called mission territories (Africa and Asia) and opened hospitals, schools etc. Today, in Africa and Asia these ministries have continued with the religious being more and more involved in administrative roles. There is an increasing number of sisters taking up new and more diversified ministries both in the Global North and Global South and community life is taking newer forms. In the West religious life has become less visible and it is commonplace for men and women to commit to ministry, not only within the Church setting but in the wider non-profit sector. In this new social and ecclesial context, the role of the religious woman becomes less clear.

Another key changing landscape is the demography of missionary Institutes which has moved from being predominantly Western (European or American) to being now, younger missionaries from other continents. Does the Global North need missionaries? At the beginning of my mission in Ireland in 2018 there were comments like, ‘what are these African priests and religious coming to do in Europe? They should stay in their own country’. And I ask: what did the early missionaries come to do in Africa? To my mind, they had a vision of what the reign of God would be like. They came to share the good news with our people and they were, in most cases, warmly

welcomed. Does the Global North need the Gospel? And my response is yes, they do. Missionaries are agents of the Gospel. Following the footsteps of the early missionaries’ recipients of the Christian message, commissioned by their own baptism, now want to take a more active part in God’s mission by sharing the faith in the countries of those who brought the good news to them.

The landscape of missionary congregations probably in the past was quite an assimilation model – where new members from other nationalities had to fit in. Now we speak more of interculturality where in dialogue we are supposed to form a new way of intercultural living with no dominant culture. For example, I am a Nigerian and I joined the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in 1981. In the early years of my life as a religious, it was not clear what was religious life and what was European. We came from different parts of Nigeria and Ghana and we were simply African sisters. We adopted one way of living – predominantly European and we took pride in this – and very little attention was paid to the fact that we came from different cultural backgrounds. This has posed some challenges for us even today. Initial formation must form new entrants for interculturality. This might mean helping candidates/religious to identify and name some obvious differences among us and discuss criteria of acceptability within the particular community.

In 2018 I joined the team at the Religious Formation Ministry Programme, Loreto House, Dublin, a project of the Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI). Permit me to use this programme which has served the Church so faithfully to explain an aspect of the changing landscape of religious missionary life in Ireland. When the programme began in 1982, the demography of the participants and team were mainly Europeans, Religious men and women dressed mostly in habits. Today, the programme has nineteen participants from eleven countries namely Angola, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, The Gambia, New Zealand. I will like to show some slides of this.

Moving from a familiar culture from the Global South to the Global North with its different

culture, brings with it joys and challenges for community living. Based on John Heron's ideas, there are four common concerns that many people have when they are in a new group for the first time. These concerns are: will I be accepted? Will I understand what people say or mean? Will I be able to participate? And will I be relevant/interesting? When a sister is missioned from the Global South to the Global North, she leaves her country but carries with her, her history, model of society and Church. She moves to a new place to learn, and learning is possible because one has a horizon, which is the totality of one's "reality". These must be integrated into the new reality.

This transition places a lot of demand on both the new comer and on the community that is receiving the individual. Therefore, it is essential that the community members prepare appropriately, not just socially but also psychologically and spiritually, to welcome her. This does not mean treating an adult like a helpless child. An orientation programme would be helpful in this regard to support both the new and old members. The orientation programme needs to take the "reality" of the new member into consideration. It ought not to be another exercise in westernisation and de-Africanisation. Both the missionary and the receiving community/Church must be ready to make adjustments. These welcoming and orientation programmes can introduce the new missionaries to the current situation of the country and best practice laying emphasis on what works and what doesn't. It took me about three years to begin to understand the Irish context or culture and still for nearly five years, I am still learning. The community is called upon to show appropriate patience and accompaniment to anyone who is relatively new or just entering the community. This requires that everyone attempts to listen, encourage and change as necessary rather than expecting incoming members to conform and change to fit into the community.

There is obvious generational gap between newer and older members in most communities. The new member, where possible, will benefit from the presence of another young person in the community or in another community in the country. It is also important that a member of the community is assigned to

mentor/accompany her – introduce her to the house showing her how things operate as well as how to get around the locality until she settles in. In time, she will find her way, get a spiritual director and form her own circle of friends. The community atmosphere must give space for people to express themselves, ask questions and leaders need to create space for this to be possible. Gittens suggests that 'given the global demographic changes that have occurred in the lifetime of today's senior members, the future of international religious communities must increasingly and intentionally become intercultural'<sup>1</sup>. The Association of African Priests and Religious in Ireland is a testimony to the increasing number of missionaries from various parts of Africa on mission.

When I joined religious life most of the sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in Nigeria were Irish with very few Nigerians. By early 1990s the picture began to change as many of the sisters returned to Ireland either because of ill health or because of age. With the decline of vocations in Europe, some of us from the Global South have been missioned to Europe forming intercultural communities. Present day Ireland is a multicultural society. I am experiencing, increasingly here, openness to people of different cultures. As missionary religious group, our intercultural communities bear witness to the gospel. However, challenges exist and if faced and dealt with appropriately the result could be a community of persons committed to each other, to the mission and their own on-going transformation as disciples. We are missionaries because we have encountered the Lord, we have fallen in love with God and so we make the commitment to be God's witnesses by living the evangelical counsels.

### **The vows**

Another changing landscape is the style of religious life. Over the years of renewal there have been many attempts to explain what the vows are and what they are not. In spite of the changing landscape, the vows remain attractive,

---

<sup>1</sup> Gittens A. J., (2015) *Living Mission Interculturally, Faith, culture and the Renewal of Praxis* A Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press Collegeville Minnesota, p.2

though vowed commitment also presents some challenges. We read from *Vita Consecrata* that ‘the present difficulties which a number of Institutes are encountering in some parts of the world must not lead to a questioning of the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is an integral part of the Church’s life’<sup>2</sup>. For the vow to be life giving, a new approach to understanding the vows is needed, one that will go beyond redefining words. How do we prepare candidates for this new reality? Some people would suggest presenting the vows in an easier way so as to attract new members. We must remember that some people have left religious life, not because too much was asked of them but because too little was asked of them. I do not think that young people or new members desire that we water down the values of religious life in order to welcome them. Aspiring members desire to see us live the vows in an authentic, human way.

It is my opinion that if we admit adults into our formation houses and form them as adults – giving them opportunities to make use of their initiatives, make mistakes, be helped to learn from these mistakes then the values of Christ especially the vows will be lived to the best of each individual’s/community’s ability. Coming from different cultures, there are aspects of the vows that are rooted in each culture. Can we encourage new members and even older members to reflect on these?

O’Murchu <sup>3</sup> asserts that today revisioning the **vow of poverty** needs to begin with a recognition that all around us is gift and that we are an integral part of creation. The evangelical understanding of poverty is more about dependence on God. Presupposed in this approach is the understanding that everything is a gift from God and should be used creatively and responsibly for the good of all. Evangelical poverty is about offering to God what God has given us. One is so grateful for this gift that one offers it to God. ‘Go sell all you have [possessions], give the money to the poor [detachment], come, follow me [discipleship]’.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the World, *Vita Consecrata*, n.3

<sup>3</sup> O’Murchu D. (2018) Religious Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, The Prospect of Refounding, Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York 10545

All is gift. But not all is to be possessed. The vow of poverty invites us to open extra space in our lives and clear away the clutter so there is more space for God as well as space to facilitate the creative use of life’s resources. To live the vow of poverty is to live in a way that matches what we say we are. If we say we are called to live in solidarity with the poor and with the earth, we should be seen as people who are trying to do just that.

It means to live in a way that is countercultural, that challenges what our society says is necessary for life and happiness. It places us on the way to defy materialism and this will require of us an honest, transparent discernment of our own lifestyle, individually and communally. This will be a very uncomfortable exercise for many of us but it will lead to the desired renewal of religious life <sup>4</sup>. I believe it is possible to introduce this concept to the new members even before they enter. Maybe the newer members already have a lot to teach us in this regard. Can we listen to them and hear what attracts them? Today, many who aspire to religious life have had tertiary education, are earning a living and are quite independent. From the time they decide to ‘come and see’, they must have undergone some process of discernment. Introducing them to the vow of poverty or asceticism is not just about taking their phones or credit cards from them. Could we have a dialogue with them about the process we use and what the process is about? Introduce them to the concept of living freely and simply and caring for the earth? Train them by living what we profess as individual and as community?

The understanding of the **vow of obedience** is changing from too much emphasis on rules and more to listening and discerning together. The vow is now less connected to questions of command and control. We need to shift emphasis from the love of power to the power of love. Although we still need power – the power of love, is the power that empowers. O’Murchu suggests that we need to form people for joint responsibility, engage them in mature adult consultation, empowering mutuality and discernment.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

How do we train candidates to exercise their God given creativity in conjunction with people? Forming for personal responsibility will enable the candidates to ask critical questions of themselves, of others and of the system. We must train them to be free enough to ask these questions for if we are open to these, we never know what the answer is going to be. We must train our candidates to be accountable, not just of money but of self, to themselves, to the community and the world at large. Here the formation process needs to emphasise joint responsibility for self, for goods and for creation. Also, we need to form them as leaders – to learn how to lead from below, not from above. Can we dare to begin/continue this journey in our formation houses and through younger members listen to what the Spirit is saying to us today? This requires of us all – the candidates, the professed members and those in authority – to be in a listening and a discerning stance.

Today's youths are trained with lots of opportunities to make choices. Does our vow of obedience have room for this? The youths today want to know if their freedom to choose or to have a voice will be taken away by the vow of obedience. We do not want to form individuals who only do what they are told. There is a need to form them as adults with the ability to make free and informed decisions. Choices made after reflection. We are to train them in discernment, train them to have the ability to distinguish between needs and wants. Train them to listen. In this process, the One whom one must listen to 'in vowed obedience, is God, speaking to the person through the inner authority that exists in everyone but also through the charism, vision, and decisions made within each congregation' <sup>5</sup>. As we know it today, the **vow of chastity** is not just about avoiding undue closeness. We chose the path of chastity so as to love more. Charity – love of God above all things, and of neighbour because of God – makes us embrace the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Our formation programme – initial and ongoing – must train people for healthy adult relating. O'Murchu points out that through relationship we encounter the Trinity. Sexuality and

psychosexual development and integration must be addressed openly and unambiguously in the formation process. The individual must be committed to this journey by being open to the other as a person, whatever his/her sexual orientation is and learn to develop meaningful relationships with others in accordance with the choice of life. The individual must be accompanied in this process.

### Dynamics of Formation

Pope St John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal Exhortation on Consecrated Life *Vita Consacrata*,<sup>6</sup> notes that the primary objective of religious formation is the preparation of the candidate for total self-giving to God, following Jesus Christ. If Christ is the root and centre of religious life, a candidate needs to know from the beginning that formation implies conversion. One can argue therefore that there is no formation without conversion, that is, without internalizing the values of Jesus Christ. Conversion is always a transforming experience and the concern of the formator is to elicit and order the desire for conversion in the candidate. Since internalization involves attitudinal change, it is important to address this question by referring to Herbert Kelman's seminal study of attitudinal change <sup>7</sup>.

Kelman describes three processes – compliance, identification and internalization – which help explain why people adopt attitudes and ways of acting. Although described separately here, in real life situations these dynamics could present in mixed forms. What is important is to be attentive to what prevails in each situation.

The first process, *compliance*, occurs when a person's ideas, attitudes and actions are influenced principally by the desire to gain a reward or to avoid punishment. This could be in the form of external conformity to rules with no deep personal conviction about what these rules stand for. A formator or community leader can make him/herself important by using reward or punishment in various forms. It could be the

<sup>5</sup> Harmer C. M. (1995). Religious Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A contemporary journey into Canaan. Twenty-Third Publications Mystic, CT 06355

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the World, *Vita Consecrata* n.1

<sup>7</sup> Kelman, H. C. Compliance, Identification and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change, In *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 2, no. 1(1958), pp.51-60



threat of evaluation, shaming, withdrawal of love or some necessities, too strict a formator/community leader. This is only 'a subtle form of blackmail which pushes one to conformity in order to avoid unpleasant consequences'<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes, however, the individual develops the attitude of *playing the game* – of doing what will be seen by others as appropriate behaviour. Compliance does not necessarily mean commitment.

Candidates or religious who operate mainly at this level may keep all the rules of the house in order to avoid being asked to withdraw and/or to achieve the reward whatever the desired reward is. An adage in my culture says that when a chicken enters a strange environment, it stands on one leg as it observes how the other chickens stand. A new environment elicits some anxiety in people and sometimes compliance, for many, seems the only helpful way to cope. But for how long does the chicken need to stand on one leg? From real life experience, candidates who only comply seem to have some hidden agenda which exhibits itself after profession with consequences for religious life and for ministry. To change this outlook and the candidate's perspective, it is essential that formation be seen as a journey of self-discovery, in this process one begins to recognize his/her strengths amid limitations and work with them. Candidates need to be rooted in a commitment to growth and wholeness. This has to go beyond keeping the rules.

An individual must be gradually prepared to take personal responsibility for his/her life on an adult level. This is accomplished through regular meetings, by establishing a relationship of mutuality, in an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust whereby the individual is led to see him/herself clearly, honestly and objectively. This shedding of light on the individual's experience helps also to keep him/her accountable to self and to others. On a new mission, he/she might need help to solve the conflicts that arise as a result of change of environment but if he/she is always told what to do in the name of obedience, then it will be challenging to find an adult balance as he/she settles down on the mission.

The second process, *identification*, occurs when attitudes and actions are adopted because of the desire to be part of a group and to maintain a relationship with an important, admired, or loved person. Even if the attitude is believed, perseverance in it is subject to the existence of the relationship itself – if relationship ends, one abandons what has been learnt. The process of identification is a necessary stage in the acquisition of values. Identification is a source of growth in the measure in which it makes us learn attitudes that increase values. 'But if the person remains at the level of identification, then the process has not reached its full term'.<sup>9</sup> It is said that books and talks are necessary for learning opinions. But to learn values we need reference models. Identification is a source of growth in the measure in which it makes us learn attitudes that increase values. The community is a fundamental means for presenting the values of religious life such as prayer, the vows, charism etc. Formators are not training the candidates to do later something other than what they are doing already. The more a value is mentioned, practiced and seen in all its versions and becomes the life and testimony of many, the easier it is, hopefully, for the candidates to see what the call they have responded to holds for them. It can be very confusing for candidates if the ideals taught and experienced in the formation process are not lived out by the professed members of the community. If the formation programme is experienced as quite different from the lived reality, unreal expectations can result in dysfunctional behaviours.

The third process is *internalization*. This occurs when attitudes, opinions and ways of acting are adopted and maintained because the person understands that this is the right thing to do. The person's attitudes, actions and decisions are congruent with his/her personal beliefs and value system. Such an individual, after profession continues to live out these values irrespective of where he/she is or what he/she does. Hence, I do not advocate a different formation programme for missionaries for Europe. The need for integral formation at all

<sup>8</sup> Cencini A. & Manenti A. (2010). Psychology and Formation. Structure and Dynamics. India Printing Works, Mumbai p.414

<sup>9</sup> Costello T, (2010) Goal and Purpose of Priestly Formation, In Vincent S. and Constello T (ed.), *Formation and Transformation*, Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, p. 8

levels cannot be overemphasized so that those who make this journey may be equipped with minds capable of reading the signs of the times and at the same time enabled to openly dialogue with the world as it is.

The processes of compliance, identification and internalization offer a framework for understanding the formative dynamics by which the essential goal of formation can be pursued, always in cooperation with the freely-given gift of grace which is poured into the candidate's heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. Motivation is what activates or directs one's being and acting. So, it is essential that the candidate builds up a relationship with Christ. If one's motivation is by choice Christ – putting on Christ at the beginning and at the end of everything – then a fertile ground is available for formation to take place. Therefore, the question of internalization of values should be one of the very central concerns for any programme of formation. But it is important to differentiate between real internalization, compliance, or identification. For it is difficult to act always and exclusively out of the love for God.

It is possible to observe the efforts made by a candidate to live out the values proclaimed by Christ. It is also possible to recognize the interference of personal interest, of identification and compliance. It is the responsibility of the formator to evaluate which of these processes is prevalent in the life of the candidate, to facilitate a gradual internalization of Gospel values, and to enable the candidate to recognize and understand his or her own motivations, goals and needs.

There are candidates who think they can consecrate themselves without the need for changing much in their lives, without the need for conversion. But the internalization of evangelical values, which formation is, demands death to the old self so that a new self-in-Christ may be born. This new person is neither a sample of human maturity nor a hero of perfection. According to Cencini, he/she is one 'who has felt won over by the look of Christ and conquered by his love'<sup>10</sup>. Such is the transformation that conversion is. It is, as St Paul reminds us, the work of the Holy Spirit

who transforms the believer into the image of the Father (2 Cor. 3: 17-18).

The action of divine grace is gratuitous and comes about through God's initiative. The candidate, moved by grace, makes him/herself available to God's work of transformation. This disposition on the part of the candidate is the fundamental attitude required for formation. The process of formation leading to transformation demands that first, the candidates must have relatively sufficient understanding of the ideals and values of religious life they wish to embrace. Secondly, he/she must sufficiently understand the demands these core values make of his/her life and way of being and acting. Thirdly, he/she must personalize these ideals and values that they become so deeply part of his/her life<sup>11</sup>. According to Cencini, there is formation only where values and content are experienced and savoured by the candidate to the point of their constituting for him/her a new way of looking at things, a new way of life.

The process of formation that leads to the internalization of the values of Christ comes about through hard work not only of the candidate but of the formator and the formation process. This points to the need for formators whose competence, commitment and maturity to handle whatever the candidates bring could be vouched for. If the candidate is to internalize Gospel values, today's formator must be someone who has internalized the values of the Gospel and who has the skills to communicate these values to candidates. He/she must have a good knowledge of the candidates as individuals, as members of a generation, and as members of a class. In other words, attention is to be paid to each candidate's development by ensuring that none is lost in the crowd of anonymity. Personal accompaniment, therefore, is central to the process of integral human formation. What is intended by this process of accompaniment is the facilitation of the candidate's taking charge of his/her life and doing so at all levels even in later years.

At the core of our vocation and consecration there exists a tension between two poles. For

<sup>10</sup> Cencini A, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2006, p.162

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Costello T, Goal and Purpose of Priestly Formation, In Vincent S. and Constello T (ed.), *Formation and Transformation*, Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, 2010, p. 14

there is what the society offers the candidate, and there is what the Gospel demands and what the Institute is all about. And while, in the words of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, the joys and hopes of the world of our time are the joys and hopes of the Church, there will be need to differentiate between aspirations that are incompatible and those that are compatible with the Gospel way of life, and the candidate must choose between these two. The option of making a choice raises a lot of tension and the individual needs to be accompanied as he/she negotiates this tension. How does what we offer our candidates prepare them to face the realities of life? We are challenged to 'ask ourselves if what we savour and offer to drink is actually *new wine* that is full-bodied and wholesome? Or despite all good intentions and praiseworthy efforts, is it wine that has been watered-down to make up for the acids – the consequence of a bad harvest or poorly pruned grapevines?' <sup>12</sup>

As described above, since the goal of formation is to internalize the values of Christ, there is need to reflect on our approach to formation critically so as to discover, together, what model of formation will help achieve this goal. Three models of formation have been described by various authors: namely the traditional, the progressive and the integrative.

The *traditional model* was the model promoted before Vatican II. Everything from content to dressing to liturgy and even manner of eating was regimented. Little diversions were noticed and corrected. Uniformity was essential feature. Much emphasis was laid on structures and adherence to rules. Criterion for selection was based on exhibition of external piety and conformity. Too little consideration was given to individual uniqueness in the formation process. This model is still widely adopted, albeit in an updated form in the formation of younger religious in some congregations today. When this is the dominant model of life either in the formation house or in the community, the individual will give up certain aspects of their cultural identity, for example ways of prayer so as to be included. In some instances, maintaining fidelity to religious life was sometimes achieved by strong internal and external structures and this led to positive

results. However, if religious have not internalised the values of religious life, when these structures are absent, they will be unable to cope and, in their disillusionment, turn their back on a life which no longer have meaning for them and leave.

The *progressive model* was developed as a reaction to the excessive impersonal and legalistic approach of the traditional model. This model was based on the absolute freedom of the individual for self-fulfilment. Individuals in formation were left to decide what they want and how they want it. This led to a laissez-faire attitude towards rules and regulations. The formators were usually non-directive. They saw their roles as creating a climate in which those in formation can fulfil their desire for self-expression. This approach did nothing to help those who were affectively immature. Some congregations have tried this and called it adult formation.

The *integrated model* is a blend of some aspects of the traditional and progressive models that are helpful for internalization of values. In this, there are attempts to lead the individual to recognize and accept the grace and gift of religious vocation. The candidate is offered a personal in-depth help in self-knowledge so as to be able to respond to the values of Christ willingly. This model encourages individuals to take responsibility for their formation and so is considered by many as the best for the achievement of the goal of formation. However, it can only be carried out successfully by formators who deal with few individuals.

Vita Consecrata states that to say "yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. Candidates come to us as adults and they need to be treated as adults. Yes, they have not lived religious life before but they have come with certain knowledge and we can train them to take personal responsibility for their lives building on previous experiences. Charles Serrao considers personal responsibility "one of the goals of the formation process."<sup>13</sup> This is rightly so because at the end of initial formation Religious are expected to continue to take

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Charles Serrao, 2014 Discernment of Religious Vocation Dhyana Publications, p.65

responsibility for their own growth and development in ongoing formation.

A sign that the candidate is taking personal responsibility for his/her life would be his/her understanding of the necessity to develop a habit of personal prayer (spiritual formation) and also the determination and self-discipline actually to carry it out even when the formators are not around. The same applies to the process of growing in relationship with others as well as responsibility with money, entertainment (human formation) and his/her attitude as regards apostolic sphere (apostolic formation). These are areas requiring high degrees of personal responsibility, that is, to respond and positively with initiative in any given situation, always under the accompaniment of the formator. Personal accompaniment is central to the process of integral human formation. It is through this personal attention on the candidate's experience which will allow the candidate to visualize his/her own journey. However, 'without a solid formation of formators, it would not be possible to provide a true and promising accompaniment of the youngest members'<sup>14</sup> for ministry in these changing times. Formation must include knowledge of and ability to share one's own culture and a willingness to listen to or learn about the culture of the other, not just their food and mode of dressing but the whole lot that make up a people.

There is need to elaborate a type of integral human formation that can allow the candidate to truly take charge of his/her life and make his/her own God's project for him/her. The purpose of planning a programme is to unify and coordinate the many elements that make up the life. With the right aim and purpose in mind, we shall find that religious formation does not tend to repress but to develop the candidate as a woman and as a Christian and then as a religious. If the programme is integrated, it will make sense to the candidate and she will be able to respond and cooperate personally so that in the end she will be truly formed as a mature religious with a well-integrated outlook on life. This process challenges us to evaluate regularly

our structures as well as our formation programme to discern what aspects need to be transformed and what aspects need to be discarded.

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore some key elements, though there are certainly others that could have been discussed, of the Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary life. I have argued that religious formation must be such that it fosters that human maturity which provides the necessary basis for Christian maturity. Religious formation, in the widest sense of the term, is the preparation for the actual living of religious life hence the emphasis on formation for personal responsibility. It includes everything that pertains to the life that the candidate is to live as a religious – individual and communal prayer, asceticism, vows and a life in community with others in an increasingly intercultural setting. This formation also includes preparation of the candidate to participate in a special way in the Church's mission through the Congregation's Charism and Apostolate wherever the need arises. Religious life is a call to live radically the Gospel values. In saying yes to this call the candidate continues the Christian journey of transformation. An integral and holistic formation of younger members would ensure that in the future 'we would not only have young consecrated persons who hold academic titles, but also ones who have been formed to identify with the values of life of *sequela Christi*'<sup>15</sup>.



<sup>14</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wine Skins*, The Consecrated Life and Its Ongoing Challenges since Vatican II n.9

<sup>15</sup> Ibid n.15



Mary Barron, OLA

## SEDOS Closing Homily

5 May 2023



It never ceases to amaze me how appropriate the daily word of God is for the situations we are experiencing.

As I began to reflect this week on these Readings in

preparation for today, and as I heard the inputs, the reflections, the sharing, I had a great sense that the Spirit of God is at work in and among us ....

This week has been a week in which our faith and convictions have been shared, a week which has generated energy and challenged us to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to us through new creative, ever-evolving personal and collective responses to the call we have heard to this missionary religious life....

Through new and creative responses to our call – as Fr. Cencini, pointed out the verb “to call” in Italian – *amare* – means ‘to love’, and God, who is love, is at the centre of all – of the call, the response, the mentality, the creative fidelity to the Message, of the Landscapes that are changing and need to be changed ... all is rooted in that love of God that ignites the passion in us to share that love....

The First Reading of today took me back to Tuesday’s discussion on the biblical and theological foundations ....

The Apostle Paul addresses the gathering in the Synagogue in Antioch, the entire community, as – *the children of Abraham as well as others who are God-fearing, stressing that this word of salvation has been sent to them*, (cf. Rom 9: 6-9).

Fr. Ayodele reminded us that with the visit of God, and with the new name of God as YHWH, the criteria for identity within the family of God’s Chosen had changed ... it was no longer genealogical – no longer had the Chosen People to be of the family of Abraham – but all those who are God-fearing.... This was a great change in the landscape of that time ... and is a challenge to us in our time.... What limits do we place on membership and identity in the family of God...?

And Paul reminds the God-fearing people of Antioch that they **are now God’s witnesses before the people.**

As missionaries today, we surely must continue to witness to God’s Message of love before the people and I would say not just before the people but in our entire ecosystem .... A Message that promotes God’s peace, so interconnected with God’s justice, and God’s dream for the communion of all the Created .... Our wounded world is in need of such witnesses....

We have been challenged throughout the week to question ourselves as to whether we truly understand the message of love we have received, if we are passionate enough about the message, if we are respectful enough or even care enough about the other cultures of our day that are also in need of God’s witnesses, (secular spaces, post-Christian spaces, situations of injustice and oppression, so many inhuman situations in our world). Perhaps some of us have found it hard to move into those spaces, to be God’s witnesses in those spaces: perhaps we find it difficult to learn the new languages that can communicate this Message in a way that speaks to them and that they can understand....

But we are called to have faith in God and trust that God will guide us to these new ways....

I feel that one of the key messages this week has been the centrality of hope ... inspite of the changing landscape that can sometimes seem depressing and overwhelming, the ambience this week has been far from pessimistic.... We are people of faith and Hope is our visiting card....

dimension of our lives that will allow us to listen, to see, to hear, to perceive, to be guided by the Spirit of God that is present in each and every one ....

To Be witnesses journeying together ... seeking together where the Way, the Truth and the Life desires to lead us....



In the Gospel we hear Jesus say clearly, ***“Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me”*** (Mt 12:18,21).

I do not think we are allowing our hearts to be too troubled by the changing landscape... there is a newness in the air. We were reminded this week that this newness is a sign of the Spirit.... Even though many mentioned the reality of the dwindling numbers, there is no need to despair – as one Speaker said, “God is calling enough missionaries for our time” ....

We are all participating in the ***Missio Dei*** and the only way to understand what that Missio Dei is about, is by coming to the Father through Jesus who tells us in today’s Gospel that he, Jesus, is *“the way and the truth, and the life”*, (Jn. 14: 6).

We can only fulfil our call to cooperate in the ***Missio Dei*** as Missionaries by approaching the Father through Jesus – and perhaps this is a challenge for many of us – a landscape of our lives that we must change – devoting more quality time to the more contemplative

The landscape of mission is changing and we are part of that change.... We are not called to worry and be troubled about the finality of that change, of what the future for missionaries will look like, where we will be or what we will do....

Rather we are called to live the mission fully in the here and now, with the same passion and zeal of our first members who risked all, even their lives, for the mission of God that they were so convinced about.... If we live daily, that passion to share the Message in our day, in creative fidelity to God’s dream for our world, truly listening and cooperating with God’s spirit, we will be missionary landscapers, cooperating in God’s dream and thus shaping the change....

Let us all pray for the grace to be missionary landscapers who, rooted in God’s love and convinced of God’s dream, live as authentic witnesses before the people and all of Creation....

## Moving forward together



*Asked by the Steering Committee to give the following day the final talk, I could not think of a better way than to follow the well-known method, see, judge and act. I have tried to bring*

*together the main points of the Seminar for each of these three phases. You find here below what I made of it. It is a bit heavy reading... All the same, I hope it be of use to you.*

**1. The SEMINAR** on the Changing Landscape of Religious-Missionary Life was an invitation to become more aware and to explore somewhat what is happening in the world in which we live today and in which we are called to live our missionary religious vocation according to the charism of our institutes, keeping in mind too what is happening in our institutes and in the Church. The world in which we live is characterized by change, which is continuous, rapid, global, unpredictable; a world of increasing cultural differences, of diversity of religious expressions, of changing social and societal values with affirmation of rights, demands for justice and claims for recognition, respect and participation; a world of global communication and interconnectedness, allowing for awareness and participation; where climate change and its impact on the environment and on populations are dangerously increasing. Cultural and religious traditional reference points are in some parts of the world no longer bearers of meaning nor pointers to global human ideals, while in other parts decreasingly so. Autonomy, personal fulfilment and freedom are given priority, weakening a sense of solidarity and community at all levels.

**2. This SEMINAR** helped us to revisit our call to the missionary consecrated life. We recalled the paradigmatic intervention of God in Exodus 3 to set his people free - God touched and moved by the plight of the oppressed and deciding to act - ; recalling the message of Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 61 and through his death and resurrection breaking down all barriers allowing all to become beloved children of God, leading Saint Paul to write in his letter to the Galatians: *There is now no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free citizen, woman nor man, as all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).*

**3. Empowered** by the Holy Spirit and believing that God is always at work (John 5) to bring about the realization of his loving design for humanity, it is with hope and joy that we look at our world, the Church and our institutes discerning the signs of the times, thanking God for what we are called to let go and free ourselves from, asking his grace for the new ventures He calls us out to engage in; setting out accepting that we do not have ready-made answers nor solutions.

We journey together in community and with others, acknowledging differences and seeking together how to live evangelical lives, upholding the dignity and the freedom of every person, privileging concertation and dialogue as we promote the unity of the community; discerning together where and for doing what God is calling us.

We engage in learning the language of today's world so as to be witnesses of God's love to all, a credible and relevant presence of the charism of our institutes and of the Church, to discover ways to acculturate the Gospel message and to allow for its inculturation, thus enhancing the coming of the God's Kingdom calling all to racial, civic and social justice.



## GROUP SHARING

### English Groups

**Q:** - Does “Justice” as God’s intervention to save those in “unjust situations” address the charism (s) of your religious community/-apostolate?

- Some of our congregations have adopted justice issues in our ministries and apostolates, especially in the last three decades through General Chapters. While other congregations by history are engaged in the ministry of justice.
- For all however, to respond more concretely to unjust situations confronting their immediate environment, congregations delved into reading the signs of times beset by wars and migration to work with and for the migrants.
- The case of the Cameroon crisis was specified whereby a congregation opened new communities in Nigeria to serve the needs of the refugees.
- Congregations by their charisms see elements of justice emerging from the biblical context that is addressed in their ministry and the stress is on the - Indigenous people - The marginalized - The vulnerable.

As congregations, all elements including resources are embedded in this ministry. The complexity of unjust situations had to encourage congregations to seek creative ways of working with other groups; the realization that to change unjust situations in political society would demand corporate voices. We take it as a challenge to address unjust structures/situations and move into justice by educating and conscientising our sisters and brothers to improve and free people to live lives as God’s people made in his image.

**Q:** - “The first step in justice issues is asking people for the help they need (not impose wants on them) and channelling resources to such specific needs”. Does this “first step” make sense in our apostolates of witnessing to the Gospel?

- Missionaries are often concerned with meeting the immediate needs of the people, hence the challenge to ask of their needs.

- However, we see that social justice is broader than mere meeting needs.
- The sense of justice in our apostolates of witnessing to the gospel is - first build a relationship of trust, respect, and understanding of the people.
- The sense of justice is a relationship with God, others, and nature/ecosystem which is also termed as the right relationship.
- Overall, needs have to be discerned to rightly develop the people.
- It is important to carry out a need’s assessment of, *See, Judge and Act* to determine what to give.

**Q:** - Mechanisms for dialogue between and among members should be in place in every religious community. Suggest ways your communities tackle or should attend to racisms and privilege status of some members that seem ubiquitous in communities.

**First of all**, within the congregation, we need to follow the principle of solidarity or mutuality in both the powers: economic and demographic powers. There is a need of exchange of finances and personnel.

**Secondly**, it is a challenge to integrate new members in a new country in the global north. However, they need to be accompanied constantly. It is a greater challenge to come to Europe or America because the receptivity of the people is poor. They may say, ‘we don’t need you.’ While missionaries who went to global south were received happily. One reason could be that they took funds along.

The groups also suggested other ways to enhance dialogue, and achieve justice. They are:

- Creating atmosphere that is conducive, demonstrates respect and values every culture. Therefore, need to encourage people to speak and listen without biases.
- Changing our mind-sets to enhance going beyond our individualism.



- Practice of inclusion in terms of language, culture and governance.
- Generate very international leadership teams and mission members wherever possible.
- Congregational advisory boards to include non-members and experts from different fields
- Address specific issues of conflict like food, tribalism and racism
- Maintenance of general funds, with contribution from every province and the right and access to the funds by every province
- Training of interculturalism, training of formators for different congregation by collaboration of congregations
- Missioning members across provinces for experiences
- Opening up dialogue for reverse course, by way of reviewing original mission plans, where applicable
- Visitations by general leadership level, to individual communities to enable one on one conversation with individuals, for effective listening, at grass root levels.



**Q:** - Synodality and ecology are justice issues receiving attention now. Hopefully, religious communities will be founded to address those needs if none exists already. Any suggestions about synodality and ecology as imperative of mission today?

Synodality and ecology are imperative to the mission today and these are not optional. This is a journey of compassion needing a long term to arrive at. Aspects required of reaching the goals include - learning together -discerning together and - working together.

**Q:** - Economic power must cede place to demographic reality for the maintenance of established (religious/congregational) structures

for the continuity of our religious communities. What are your thoughts?

There have been various answers pertaining to the above question. Following are the various responses:

a) We live in multicultural communities. Every culture is unique, every culture needs redemption. The problem is that one culture becomes a point of reference. However, it is natural to have one culture of reference. In the past, the culture of the founder/foundress was the culture of reference or the dominant culture in the congregation. All were made to think that that is the culture of the Church or congregation. But in fact, it was the culture of the country where the founder/foundress came from for eg. Germany. Now that the members from founder's culture are in minority or extinct, that culture should not be imposed on the whole congregation.

b) We need to take the spirit behind the traditions of the founding generation rather than outrightly taking the traditions away completely.

c) The problem of racism and privileged culture could be reduced with proper facilitation to open discussion and dialogue among members of the community.

d) Dialogue, faith-sharing, renewal programmes both at the intra-congregational and inter-congregational could help in being open to other cultures and mindsets.

e) At incarnation, Jesus did not give up his divinity/Godhead. When we go to a new place, it is not advisable to give up our culture fully but to be open to other cultures and learn from them. Concurrently, the new culture or the people need also to learn from the missionary coming from another culture.

**Q:** - Conflict of interest in leadership or in the exercise of authority should be legislated fairness purposes. What do you think?

Leadership is an important element in any organization/congregation. It has to be exercised in all fairness. By and large, it is being followed. Any appointment to different positions ought to be done not based on one's friendship or culture or nationality, but based on person's merits and aptitude. Also, this principle needs to be followed in distribution of funds.

Sometimes, leaders may tend to do favouritism to members who bring money to the congregation. We need to have a team decision with checks and balance with proper discernment.

**Q:** - Vocation recruitments of migrants should be prioritized to respond to vocation shortages in North-Atlantic contexts. What are the advantages or disadvantages of this suggestion?

In today's context, vocational promotion needs to be done with utmost care.

**a)** Rather than doing vocation promotion among migrants alone, our focus ought to be on vocation recruitment in general. Rather than continuation of our congregation, our focus should be on continuation of mission. Congregations could collaborate with one another in mission like UISG in South Sudan so that the shortage of vocations may not affect the mission work.

**b)** Catholic migrants from the global south either don't feel free or don't fit in parishes in Europe. The fault lies on both sides: the receiving communities and migrants.

### **Grupo Español**

**Q:** - ¿Cuáles son los puntos de resonancia o disonancia al llamar a nuestros tiempos "Era de la Justicia"?

Por un lado, estamos de acuerdo con llamar a nuestra era "Era de la Justicia" porque Dios continúa visitando a su pueblo, hay signos de los tiempos, y los reconocemos como Vida Religiosa, la gente también los reconoce. También vemos que continúan surgiendo profetas, como Papa Francisco. Dios no se ha cansado y hoy también quiere iniciar o ha ya iniciado un nuevo tiempo con una propuesta de justicia. Siempre ha habido profetas y las gentes, en todas las épocas, han tenido un anhelo de mayor justicia. Pero, a diferencia de otras épocas pasadas, hoy existe una conciencia y expresión mucho más colectiva en la búsqueda de justicia. La gente joven no se calla y dice las cosas como están...nosotros, como Vida Religiosa, también tenemos más conciencia, aunque si los pasos que damos son tímidos...

Por el otro lado, vemos que tenemos un sentido de Justicia muy intelectual, o incluso virtual, que no nos empeña en un compromiso de denuncia y

transformación social. No nos queremos exponer, no queremos pagar el precio...al menos en nuestros países europeos somos muy pasivos.

Nos parece que llamar a nuestro tiempo era de la justicia es demasiado ambicioso, una definición que le está grande...¿porque? Porque vemos que la violencia, grande o pequeña, nacional/internacional/global o domestica está creciendo...se están legitimando guerras cada vez mas armadas y se promueven incluso juegos para que los niños y jóvenes aprendan a matar y se nos hace difícil llamar a nuestra era "Era de justicia". Porque también vemos que cada uno tiene una interpretación personal de lo que es justicia, tenemos una pluralidad de interpretaciones y cada uno escoge los valores o la visión que le va bien, no compartimos una ética común y esto hace difícil un compromiso común para promover la justicia.

Dentro de nuestras comunidades religiosas, de nuestras Congregaciones, hay un sentido fuerte de justicia, de la dignidad personal de cada miembro, todas tenemos derecho a recibir un trato justo, a participar, a opinar, a hacer y deshacer dentro de la congregación hasta el punto de que el papel del Liderazgo ha cambiado mucho, y algunos miembros lo llegan a considerar innecesario. Nos preguntamos como la Vida comunitaria y los votos religiosos puedan ser compatibles con el despertar de este sentido de justicia en los miembros. En referencia a esto, pensamos que el estilo sinodal que la Iglesia está recuperando es la fuerza salvadora de la Vida Religiosa pues este es nuestro estilo genuino, el único que puede salvarnos del individualismo que está destruyendo nuestras comunidades...es el estilo que nos ayuda a buscar un bien común, construyendo comunidad.

De consecuencia, surge la pregunta: ¿de qué Justicia estamos hablando, de una justicia del individuo o de una justicia comunitaria, del pueblo, incluso global y planetaria? Porque no siempre la justicia que busca un individuo equivale a la justicia que necesita un pueblo entero o una comunidad o todo el planeta...¿Qué tipo de justicia busca nuestra era?

### **Reflexión del grupo Español**

**Símbolo:** Todas En La Misma Barca

**Introducción:** El símbolo de la barca, es el que nos ha inspirado para significar lo que hemos

vicido en estos días de seminario. **Todas Y Todas En La Misma Barca.** Una barca fragil, como son fragiles nuestra vida, la vida de las comunidades y de nuestras congregaciones. Tenemos la fuerza en el Amor y en la fuerza del ser **Todos, Todas Juntas.**

La unica certeza que tenemos es la realidad que vivimos: El CAMBIO

Canto: Todo Cambia de Mercedes Sosa:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l26wReW53mw>

### **Retos para el Camino:**

En nuestro grupo, nos hemos interrogado mucho sobre los temas que aquí nos han presentado.

La reflexión y el compartir ha sido mucho mayor de lo que aquí presentamos. Cada una lleva de Nemi un equipaje más pesado del que trajimos y lo hemos representado en algunas frases y palabras que nos alimentan y dan nuevas luces a nuestro camino personal y de nuestras congregaciones.

### **Las frases que sintetizan nuestra reflexión:**

1. BANI El Nuevo Entorno Que Nos Toca Vivir
2. Fomentar el Diálogo siempre y en todas las etapas
3. Interculturalidad
4. Misión como justicia,
5. Promotor de la diversidad, guardian de unidad
6. Vulnerabilidad, incertidumbre, fragilidad
7. Camino de Corresponsabilidad –sinodalidad
8. Sabiduría de la comunidad, en la comunidad.
9. Sentido de Pertenencia-internalización
10. Formación permanente en todos los sentidos
11. ¿Qué cambiar de la estructura de la formación?
12. Testimonio de Evangelio-coherencia de la VR
13. Cómo salir de nuestras autoreferencias congregacionales para vivir el Evangelio
14. Fortalecer nuestro enamoramiento de Jesús, por medio de la contemplación.



## Evaluation

### Some Thoughts of English Participants

#### 1. What ideas are you taking with you from this Seminar?

Keep the fire of missionary zeal burning.

The key insights each group shared on the final day of the presentation, need to be pondered and acted upon.

God is intervening at every moment of our lives. He continues to visit his people. We need to search for Him together in order to find Him.

Sharing in the group was enriching with happy memories of meeting many, companions on the journey, with time to share our stories.

We are called to be servant leaders and help our members to be prophetic witnesses by their intercultural life.

A greater awareness of the changing landscape of religious missionary life and the need for creative reactions to be relevant.

Justice is the heart of mission today, more than ever before.

There is change in the world, we need to shape the change.

Honouring the past, embracing the present and inspiring the future.

Connect ideas, models, examples related with the prevailing sensitivity, mentality and behaviour patterns in the world today, in society.

The idea of increasing cooperation with other congregations in the areas of:

Formation, ongoing formation, Interculturality, the age of justice, Dialogue, Justice – VUCA and BANI and many other new insights.

Acculturation and inculturation – Every culture can unveil the richness of the Gospel.

Synodality in mission is asked of us at different levels.

Understanding authority and leadership as dialogue.

A greater awareness of the changing landscape of Religious missionary life and the urgency for creative responses to be relevant.

Charisms are a gift of God to the world, Church.

Change our focus from quantity to quality of religious life. The dedicated religious can become leaven and bring transformation.

We have to learn the ‘secular language’ to comprehend the modern world.

Create a new human identity based on communion, not on race.

The idea of the “communion of sharing” as understood from Pope Francis’ Economy is really needed in our world.

Mutual listening to perceive what is said and what is not said – voice of the invisible.

Strong movement from Global South to Global North. A need for evangelization and re-evangelization on all continents.

Deepen the listening capacity in the intensive use of the social media.

#### 2. Some valuable insights for your ministry?

Maintain a balance between the vision of the Founder and that of those who want to be different.

It is God's mission. We are called to withdraw when the mission is accomplished.

The role of leadership is to promote unity and communion among members.

Need to change our mindset to create new opportunities.

Ministry to the peripheries – prophetic witness.

Encouragement to be creative in Christ’s demanding mission, bringing healing, reconciliation, justice and hope.

Finding new ways of transmitting the Gospel, charism and spirituality to people through their own culture and language with respect for every person, culture, and religion.

Making our situation of admonishment an opportunity for transformation.

Accompany the young in formation with love and care and listen to the elders as well.

Authentic prophetic witnessing and compassion; the ministry of joy and happiness are inspiring insights.

Find ways to merge the diminishing Provinces.

#### 3. Any suggestions that could improve the Seminar?

The inputs were good and diverse, multicultural. Topics were well balanced. Very educative, informative, inspiring and insightful. Very good organization and participation. Food and accommodation – everything was very good.



Should the hybrid formula continue? If needed, please make sure you have the necessary tools. It might be better to separate the online from the in-person.

Prepare the technical and liturgical part in advance.

Spiritual/psychological advice on how to approach the diminishing number of members in our communities. How should we personally/community face this situation? Perhaps by good example and good practice.

Need to choose and explore the theme for the Seminar early.

The cultural night should be organized in advance and be guided by a member of the team. There could be more animation.

The “live” contribution of those that intervened was invaluable. Need to have more time for questions.

A session on “*how to be a missionary in the Digital World*” could be continued add another SEDOS meeting or seminar.

Not have the same Speaker for the whole day.

Encourage more USG (Male) members to attend.

Missed their side of the story in groups.

A Shorter Morning Prayer.

The participants need to make more effort to attend the socializing time.

## Some Thoughts of Online Participants

### 1. What ideas are you taking with you from this Seminar?

It was a blessing to be able to participate Online. I enjoyed all the Sessions I could attend. I was impressed by the organisation of the Seminar and by the in-put of all the Speakers. Thanks for the opportunity to take part online. The shared experiences in the panel were very enriching. The topic was well chosen and Mary Barron’s assessment in her opening Address with the geographical landscaping, was very good.

Mission is not about us. It is GOD’S MISSION. we are just the YEAST in God’s hands – we are the instruments. It is anywhere and everywhere. It has no frontiers. There is greater need to work together. Living in harmony community is also part of mission and it is very important to give a living witness.

Gratitude to the past and to the present, the challenge to look to the future with hope, and dare to make a creative commitment.

We are called to be servant leaders like Jesus, our Master.

Training involves conversion and ongoing transformation. Ongoing formation is very important as it is a daily call to be open and receptive.

We need to form and prepare young people to know, to respect and appreciate the values of other cultures and not to be afraid of those who have a different culture. Difference should not be a barrier, but an opportunity to evangelise. We also need to be more attentive to what the young ones are projecting.

God always visits us to lead us to what is positive. We each need to consider if one’s presence testifies to God’s visit and transmits hope to those around one.

Similarly, I must appreciate, listen to and understand the other languages in order to be listened to and understood in turn.

We are challenged to share our vulnerability, improve advocacy and deal with issues related to racism.

The ideas that emerged about Synodality were also very helpful.

We need to rethink Formation and on-going Formation in the light of the “Age of Justice”, as a global concept.

We need to continue on-going dialogue and our efforts to cooperate participate and support each other.



### 2. Some valuable insights for your ministry?

We need to work on, embrace and develop the constructive changes. We need not be discouraged by decreasing numbers, but

appreciate the fact that those who remain have a sense of creativity and adaptability.

Maintain a balance between the vision of the Founder and that of those who have a right to be different but want to lead this kind of life.

The need to give more space to open dialogue.

Identify a common approach (commonalities) and address disagreement through discussion. Focus on the question: What can we offer? AND What we need?

Compliance does not necessarily mean commitment.

Work on restructuring and preparing members for change

**Formation:** the need for formative communities in the field of ongoing formation

Interculturality: a call of the moment, dare to look at the differences, respect, integrate

**Missionary:** being a Christian is being a missionary, I am always called to go out to the other, make the other the centre. This is the first step of being a missionary, the rest is secondary!

Mission is God's mission. Like the Apostles, we are called to withdraw once the mission is accomplished.

The role of leadership is to promote unity and communion among members.

Take the VUCA and the BANI evaluation into account when making decisions.

To think about the quality of formation and not always the quantity.

To be shepherds through our pastoral approach and be able to privilege dialogue.

Knowing that changing the process takes time, we must be patient, ready to listen to the Spirit, knowing that all things change but God does not change.

The six points that Father Paulus Budi brought up within the theme of "Governance and Leadership" were very interesting. I really liked it when he said that we should be "guardians of unity". I would add "guardians of hope".

The comments on Formation were very good, both from the female and male perspective.

We need to invest a lot in the education of members of Consecrated Religious Life and future priests; provide an updated formation adapted to the current time.

The explanation of Acculturation and Inculturation was invaluable and clearly presented. In all we do, we have to be sensitive to the others in our encounters.

To be relevant, we need to review our structures, work with each other and involve more and more lay participation.

### **3. Any suggestions to improve the Seminar**

The Online Seminar worked really well. I could hear all the speakers clearly. A few times when the moderator didn't speak directly into the microphone, it was rather difficult to understand. Therefore, the quality of the Online Seminar (through Zoom meeting) could be improved.

Short breaks were really helpful. Spending a long time in front of a screen is stressful.

Spiritual/psychological perspectives on the aspect of the diminishing numbers in our communities and how to face this situation personally/in community would be more helpful, perhaps with examples and good practice

Thanks for sharing the recordings of the talks and the prayer for the day.

I was on-line from South Africa. We are having load shedding, so one day we were 23 hours without electricity so I couldn't recharge but when I could I was happy with what I received.

### **Quelques idées des participants Italiens, Français et Espagnols.**

**1. Quali idee stai portando via da questo seminario?**

**¿Qué ideas te llevas de este seminario?**

**Quelles idées emportez-vous lors de ce séminaire ?**

Una idea dava que HAY QUE HACER UN CAMBIO en la vida personal, comunitaria, congregacional.

Il seminario era molto ricco di spunti per continuare ad approfondire all'interno delle nostre congregazioni, ottima la scelta dei relatori, certamente il fatto che le maggior parte forse in presenza è stato molto positivo, comme anche lo scambio in gruppo.

« Chaque temps est le temps de Dieu » donner une réponse créative à la vie religieuse missionnaire = vie de foi, de conviction de

conversion permanente, d'accueil, de respect, de dialogue et d'Espérance...

Changement du paysage de la vie religieuse missionnaire implique la conversion et le dialogue, l'ouverture, l'acculturation, l'inculturation, la confiance et l'espérance.

Estar abierto al panorama del cambio en la vida religiosa, porque este es un tiempo de cambio y de posibilidades.

La figura del líder como mediador de conflictos y promotor de la unidad en tiempos de cambio.

Investir en misiones a otros continentes, buscar alianzas, si no unidos seremos más fuertes.

Ser evangelizador es dejarse evangelizar (docibilidad).

Dinámica de la formación: adaptabilidad, identificación.

## **2. Hai trovato degli spunti utili per il tuo ministero?**

### **¿Encontró algunas ideas importantes para su ministerio?**

#### **Avez-vous reçu des informations utiles pour votre ministère ?**

Sí, Várias – era de justicia crecer en la capacidad de aduiranse. De la presencia de Dios en nuestro mundo roto.

La Formación continue toute la vie, aussi dans la communauté qui est un laboratoire de vie, de conversion, de discernement et d'obéissance. Ouvert aux autres, envers les événements et à Dieu.

Nouvelles définitions d'acculturation et d'inculturation.

Misión como Dialogo Profético.

Método: Sinodalidad.

Contenidos: Leídos con el lenguaje de la secularización cambio de VUCA al BANI.

Estrategias: Liderazgo que promueve la diversidad y guardián de la unidad. La formación como aculturación. Vive con mentalidad empresarial carismática.

Los descritos anteriormente en la pregunta número 1, excepto el tercer punto.

Me parece que debería haber una dinámica más animadora de los momentos encuentro y fiesta.

Propongo que haya un grupo animador, que ayude a la organización y a la animación.

Effectivement comme religieuse beaucoup d'informations perçues ont été évoquées tant au niveau personnel, que communautaire et apostolique.

## **4. Hai suggerimenti per migliorare il seminario?**

### **¿Tiene alguna sugerencia para mejorar el seminario?**

#### **Avez-vous des suggestions pour améliorer le séminaire ?**

Seguir profundizando este tema, con otros posibles puntos de vista o de acercamientos.

La misión un medio para oponer la violencia, Promotores de paz.

Pensar en un equipo o alguien para animar con cantos o danzas, en los intervalos.

Mejorar la tecnología. Todavía no está bien.

D'abord un grand remerciement aux organisateurs du Séminaire.

La prochaine fois en pourrait respecter et renouveler le programme si c'est possible. Les soirées récréatives n'ont pas plu à tout le monde.

Merci pour toutes les interventions de qualité, et pour ce thème d'actualité. J'ai apprécié les travaux de groupes – enrichissant.

Je préfère la messe tous ensemble que dans les petits groupes.

Le partage biblique est bon en groupes de langues.

Pour moi je préfère les soirées libres.

Bonne animation partagée – Merci aux sœurs à la technique, aux Traductrices. Merci à l'équipe SEDOS.

Me parece que debería hacer una dinámica más animadora de los momentos de fraternidad y los momentos de encuentro y fiesta.

Propongo que haya un grupo animador, que ayude a la organización y a la animación.

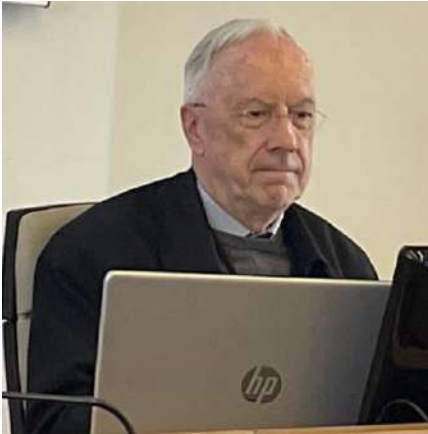
Tante grazie agli organizzatori; Molto bene. Forse per la prossima volta si potrebbe pensare un po' ad organizzare meglio le serate – per esempio qualche visita a Nemi e gli intorno, oppure la presentazione di diversi corsi.

La messa è bella celebrare tutti insieme non soltanto in Inglese, anche in Italiano.

Que los ponentes hablen más despacio, porque era muy complicado con las traducciones. Perdimos muchas cosas preciosas, no era posible seguirlo todo.

Tener un grupo de animación, con una hoja en todos los idiomas, para los intervalos de las reuniones, también para dinamizar la noche de la integración.

## How can what we do become truly meaningful and fruitful?



Everyone dreams that what they do may be meaningful to themselves and fruitful to others. We often focus on the satisfaction we may or

the cross took hold and became the sign par excellence with which Christians identified themselves.

But it is again the apostle Paul who tries to come to our aid to correctly assess the value of the life of Jesus and that with his well-known Christ hymn that we can read in his letter to the Philippians. We write this one out for a moment because it contains several steps that can set us on the road in our reflection on the meaningfulness and fruitfulness of what we do with and in our lives.

may not experience ourselves in the activity we perform and the approval, thanks and applause we may or may not also receive from others. But are these the only and proper criteria for judging the value of an activity? What if we are called upon to perform a work that does not seem meaningful to us at all, and what if in the process the hoped-for thanks and applause are also absent? Should we then immediately decide that what we are doing is futile and unfruitful? Meaningfulness and fruitfulness need a different measure to be evaluated. As Christians, we have in Jesus himself an example, indeed the example par excellence, to value something as meaningful and fruitful. In the eyes of his contemporaries, however, his life and the mission he had to fulfill was anything but meaningful and fruitful, for it ended in grandiose failure. When a person is judged because of his words and deeds, and even has to die on a cross in a totally unjust way like a criminal, we can hardly put the words meaningfulness and fruitfulness into our mouths. It has its reason why the first Christians hesitated to take the sign of the cross as their symbol. In the catacombs one can find the Good Shepherd as an image, a dove of peace with a palm branch in its beak or the fish as signs of Christ, but one will search in vain for an image of a cross. Nay, with this hideous martyrdom, the young Christian church could hardly identify itself. It took several centuries before

*“He who existed in divine majesty did not want to cling to equality with God. He stripped Himself and took upon Himself the existence of a slave; He became equal to men. And appearing as man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, to death on the cross. Therefore, God exalted Him on high and granted Him the Name which is above all names, that at the mention of His name, every knee should bow in heaven, on earth and under the earth; and every tongue should confess, to the glory of God the Father, Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:6-11).*

The hymn falls into two movements: a movement downward, this one of self-emptying or “kenosis,” and a movement upward, this one of exaltation or “hypsosis.” But both movements are essentially and indissolubly linked.

The self-emptying or kenosis of Jesus is expressed in the hymn in three steps. Jesus consciously renounces his equality with God and sacrificed his divine majesty, as it were, in order to become equal to man. We can speak here of the kenosis of the incarnation, and this was not a sham, but was fulfilled 100% by Jesus. Translated to our situation, we could say that we too are invited to become fully human, to fully fill in and live our humanity and radically set aside everything that tempts us to pretend to be somewhat better than we really



are. "Become who you are," sounds like an invitation here. Because deep within us we have a tendency to assume piousness, to live with masks and to do everything possible to appear good, yes, even better, to others through our appearance, obviously in the vain hope of being praised for it. It is the vanity that caresses us and that puts a brake on the invitation to become humble like Jesus, to simply be ourselves, authentic, simple and without pretense. We can immediately ask the question here about this first fundamental movement in our lives, the movement that deals with the worm that constantly gnaws at us and that is so aptly described in the book of Genesis as original sin: the temptation to want to become our own god and thereby deny our humanity. Only when we live our humanity in an authentic way will we find peace with and within ourselves and be reachable to others, and the foundation is laid upon which our actions can become truly fruitful. The path to self-realization is paved here by the seemingly opposite movement, this one of self-emptying.

But Jesus goes even further, and the hymn speaks of slave: the one who puts himself in the lowest place and becomes a servant to others. Service here becomes the watchword as an antidote to our tendency to want to rule over others. Even leadership will henceforth be fulfilled in a spirit of service. It was once again aptly expressed at the coronation of King Charles who explicitly stated that he would exercise his kingship in a spirit of service. "*I have not come to be served, but to serve*" (Mt. 20:28). And as if this were not enough in the downward movement, Jesus' kenosis ends with death on the cross. He is not even granted an honorable death, but a shameful death normally reserved for criminals. Jesus thus expresses in the most radical way his solidarity with those who live at the lowest level of society, with those who are no longer even considered human beings, who have completely lost their human dignity or are no longer considered by others as fully human beings. Here the invitation sounds to become truly solidary with the most marginal human being, and to maintain an unconditional respect for fragile life, especially for those who cannot stand up for their own rights as human beings. It is in this solidarity and respect that we will be able to truly manifest ourselves as

human beings and fellow human beings. But we can add that it was this very thing that the Father asked of Jesus, it was the expression of his total obedience to the Father. Doing the Father's will was the keynote and at the same time the refrain of Jesus' life. To this end He appeared on earth, and to this end we too are invited. Our lives receive a mission from God, and it is to this mission that we must obey, and not the mission we would like to give ourselves. It teaches us that we should not seek worldly success, but simply faithfully go every day on the path God has set out for us, asking each day what God's Will is for us and at the same time asking God's grace to know, accept and also accomplish this Will. The question then no longer sounds whether what we do is meaningful and fruitful, and that based on our supposedly positive feeling about it and the applause we receive from others, but rather whether we live in accordance with the Will of God. It is in this that we must seek the meaningfulness and fruitfulness of our lives and actions.

And here we move on to the second movement, this one of exaltation or hypsosis. It is only then that the work Jesus did here on earth was brought to true completion by his Father and that the redemption of humanity was realized. What a mysterious proclamation we may receive here. So, the real success of our lives does not depend at all on whether we can bring our mission to a good and successful conclusion and thereby be praised and honored by the world, but rather on whether or not we have lived and worked according to the mission we had received from God. Looking at Jesus, this means that we lived our humanity fully and authentically, that we positioned ourselves as a servant to others and not as a ruler, and that we were even willing to go to the extreme and give our lives to promote and restore the well-being and humanity of everyone when it was eclipsed, and willing to suffer and be reviled for it.

The completion of Jesus' work on earth was accomplished by the Father, not by Jesus Himself. It is the Father who exalted Jesus on high after He arrived on earth in the deepest possible valley. What comfort we can derive from these words, when through human

circumstances and especially lowly decisions, inspired solely by envy, the root of all evil and also the greatest sin man can make, the work we do is arrogantly taken out of our hands, negatively judged and even destroyed. How many are confronted with this in their lives, in a world that can be particularly harsh, unmerciful and above all unjust, in a world where there is no hesitation in simply dropping people overnight and pushing them aside? When these then have set everything up for success, they will despair and sink into a bitter struggle against the so-called injustice done to them. And what they will lose most of all is the inner peace and tranquility to continue to see the meaning and fruitfulness of their lives through the so-called injustice done to them. Here we can learn a lot from Jesus. His life became maximally meaningful and fruitful precisely when He was nailed to the cross with open arms completely helpless and thus gave His life out of His hands. He Himself could do nothing more than simply obey the Will of the Father to the utmost and accept what this following of the Will would lead Him to. It reminds us that we all have a mission to fulfill that we have not been given ownership of, but only management of. It is a mission whose scenario is only partially in our own hands, because it is part of the universal plan that God has with the world and with humanity. We are a link in it, often only a weak link, but that is simply the assignment we have received in life. But we know that a weak link is usually nurtured with more attention and care and concern. It is this link that we may be that God uses to realize His Kingdom on earth. For that is our sole and ultimate mission that we have received: to participate in the realization of the Kingdom of God, as we pray daily in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." It is God who takes the initiative for this, engages us for it, gives us the grace to do so, call it the power of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately completes this work. But we are called to cooperate in this, and it is in this that our fruitfulness will consist.

There is something cosmological in the second movement: "Under the earth, on the earth and in heaven." The little that we may do here on earth takes on an eternal and cosmic dimension in the

hands of God. It has value in eternity, no matter how small and humble it may be! This always reminds me of people with severe disabilities, who can only invite others so that people would respect and love them. That is the mission they have received from God in their limitedness: to call fellow human beings to become more respectful and loving. Is there a greater mission than this in a world where respect and love are so often under-present or even completely repressed? That is their participation in the realization of the Kingdom of God!

Finally, the exclamation sounds that Jesus Christ is Lord. This should resound throughout the world, especially in our own hearts, for it is Christ who is our unique reference to make our life here on earth meaningful and fruitful. He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 4:6). Unlike in the time of the catacombs, we now dare to draw ourselves with the cross and look up to it, to contemplate and meditate in it, on the one hand, the brokenness of our humanity, including and especially our own brokenness and fragility, but also, on the other hand, to perceive in it our ultimate destiny, of man redeemed from the absolute power of evil and allowed to live with the perspective of resurrection.

What better way to end than with another word from our great apostle Paul, this time noted in his first letter to the Christians of Corinth.

*"Consider your own calling, brethren. By human standards there were not many learned, not many powerful, not many of high birth. No, what to the world is foolish, God has chosen to shame the wise; what to the world is weak, God has chosen to shame the strong; what to the world is of low birth and insignificant, God has chosen; what is nothing to nullify what is something, so that before God no man should glory in himself. ... If anyone wants to glory, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 26-31).* Here the paradox of the Gospel is at its best. It is up to us to discover in this paradox the true meaning of our lives and to be fruitful in it as well!

# WALKING WITH POPE FRANCIS

## *The Official Documents in Everyday Language*

James H. Kroeger, MM

To mark the tenth anniversary of Pope Francis's pontificate, here are ten of his most important documents, presented in a single, reader-friendly volume.

*"These succinct popularizations introduce us to the engaging vision of Pope Francis in summary form. ... Hopefully, as you peruse these materials, you will discover that they are 'appetizers' for the full writings of Pope Francis. May you also discover the vibrant 'missionary spirit' of Pope Francis: 'Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment.'"*

—From the Foreword by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle

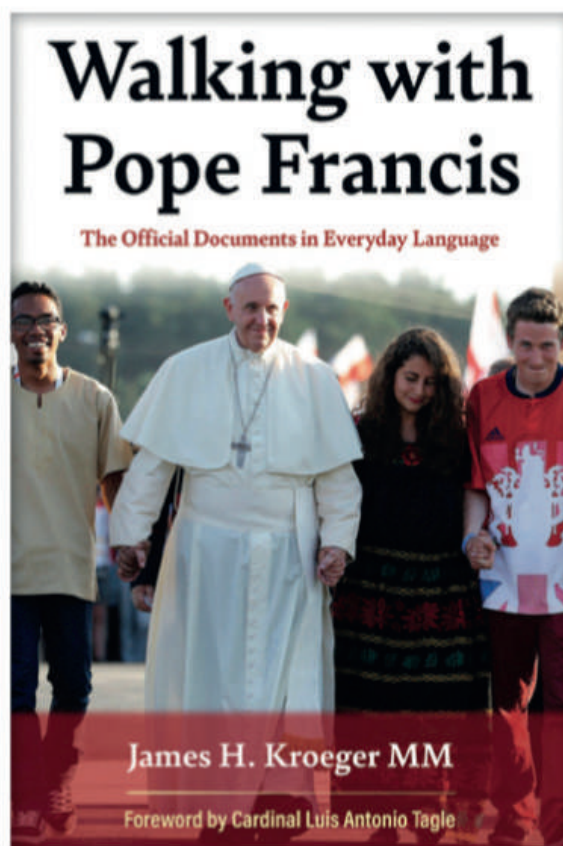
*"James Kroeger provides a wonderful avenue for 'Catholics in the pews' (and others) to access the inspiring thought and vision of Pope Francis. In his synthesis of ten major documents, Kroeger has faithfully captured the main points and phrases in this shortened and accessible format. We thank him for opening up the treasure of Pope Francis for a broader audience."*

—Roger Schroeder, SVD, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

This volume offers condensed presentations of ten pivotal documents by Pope Francis, aiming faithfully to capture the central insights of the papal documents and communicate them in ordinary language. The documents include:

• *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith, 2013) • *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel, 2013) • *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy, 2015) • *Laudato Si* (On Care for Our Common Home, 2015) • *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love, 2016) • *Gaudete et Exsultate* (On the Call to Holiness in Today's World, 2016) • *Christus Vivit* (Christ Is Alive, 2019) • *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazon, 2020) • *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship, 2020) • *Desiderio Desideravi* (The Liturgical Formation of the People of God, 2022).

**James H. Kroeger, MM**, is a Maryknoll priest with a doctorate in missiology from Rome. A long-time professor of mission theology at the Loyola School of Theology and East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, the Philippines, he has written or edited more than thirty books, including three Orbis titles: *Once Upon a Time in Asia*, *Living Mission*, and *The Gift of Mission*.



APRIL 2023

ISBN 978-1-62698-513-1

5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

\$20.00 paperback

# WE WISH YOU ALL A HAPPY SUMMER HOLIDAY



