



The Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life

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SEDOS

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Editorial



Dear Members and Friends,

Here we bring you the May-June issue of Bulletin based on the talks of the guests Speakers and the sharing of the members. It

was a really good Residential Seminar. We hoped many would attend the Seminar in Nemi as the COVID situation has now normalised somewhat. The number has yet to grow. Maybe we need to stress this point that being in presence is a real experience. Although there is an online option there is no alternative to being present for a real experience. As a feedback many participants appreciated the theme of the seminar, “Changing Landscape of Religious-Missionary Life” as apt and relevant in today’s context. The surroundings around the Lake of Nemi helped reflection on the landscape. The various prolific plants, the products of the surrounding area, were a fitting offertory at the altar as the symbolic gift of all the members. The same plants were carried by all the participants as a concrete message to “Care and Multiply.”

In the opening article we have added the beautiful prayer Anna Damas, SSsP, wrote on three great women in the Bible: Naomi, Oprah and Ruth who went through the experience of a changing landscape. The prayer rightly directed the thoughts and reflections of the participants to what one is going to travel through.

Another strong orientation to the changing landscape was given by Mary Barron, OLA, in her opening talk. Quoting the words of Pope Francis, ***“we are not living in an era of change but in a change of era”***, she points out that the changes taking place in society, technology, and politics are not simply a continuation of existing trends or a natural evolution of human progress but witness to a fundamental shift in the way

people live and interact. According to her, “Pope Francis’ statement reflects a deep concern about the direction of society and the need for bold action to address the challenges facing humanity.”

In his opening Address Msgr. José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM, presents the history of the religious and missionary life: how in the past it has been changing and how it has been continuously changing. There have always been challenges. The present era too poses many challenges to the religious-missionary life.

The main Talk Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD, gave on the theme, “Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life”, was from the Governance/Leadership perspective, where he presented the present scenario of the Divine Word Society (SVD Congregation). He described how the Congregation is facing this phenomenon of a changing landscape in its religious-missionary life and the way it is coping with the new challenges and the new possibilities. The article calls for reflection and introspection as every Congregation stands in the same troubled waters.

The following four articles are the experiences member congregations shared in a panel discussion. In the first presentation, “Changing Landscape of Religious Life and Mission”, Armin Luistro, FSC, states that due to the changing landscape there is an enormous decline in vocations but this is not a cause for fear as the quality of religious life and mission has improved. It is a time to transform into leaven. He calls upon all the members to come out of their exclusive club of Brothers, with a “capital B”, to become little sisters and brothers for “those far from salvation”.

In the second presentation of the panel, Theodosia Baki, TSSF, speaks of the Joys and Challenges the members of the congregations face in a Changing Landscape. These

challenges, she says, call the congregational leaders to inculcate the attitude of listening, of being present and of building positive energy within and around all.

In the third presentation of the panel, Didier Lawson, SMA, speaks about Governance-Animation-Finance. These three elements, he says, are expressions that constitute the refrain of the same song: cohesion, unity for good cooperation in our current missionary life despite our different charisms and visions.

In the last presentation of the panel on the “Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary life” Mary John, SSpS, focussed on religious women in Asia and India in particular, where the number of religious women has grown enormously. In this regard she invites the Church to be more attentive, inclusive and discerning in the way mission is carried out. She stresses the need for dialogue, understanding, authority, leadership, and an improvement in gender relations. She states, the “Changing Landscape asks for changes in mentality, organisation and style of functioning”.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD,

Director of SEDOS



Anna Damas, SSpS

Opening Prayer

There is a famine in Bethlehem, the City of Bread has no more bread for its people.

Together with her husband and sons, Naomi becomes an economic migrant and goes to live a better life in Moab. Not her choice, but a necessity of survival.

The landscape of her life is changing.

Disaster strikes once again: her husband and both her sons die. And she makes her choice to go home. Home to Bethlehem that has bread again. Home to her God who is with her people in Judah.

Both her daughters-in-law, Oprah and Ruth, accompany her on the road from Moab to Judah. The landscape is changing, and they reach the boarder, the point of decision.

“Go home where you belong”, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law, “Go home to a better life under the protection of your gods.”

And Oprah listens. She makes the intelligent choice for her future. She returns to her roots and affirms her identity inherited from her culture of origin.

And Ruth listens too. She hears her heart making a different choice than Oprah's: Ruth's home is with her mother-in-law. Her home is found in relationship with Naomi, and with Naomi's God.

Ruth's inner landscape is changing; her identity grows into something new: a new people, a new God, an unknown future.



TRASNA

The pilgrims paused on the ancient stones
In the mountain gap.

Behind them stretched the roadway
they had travelled.
Ahead, mist hid the track.

Unspoken the question hovered:
Why go on? Is life not short enough?
Why seek to pierce its mystery?
Why venture further on strange paths,
risking all'

Surely that is a gamble for fools - or lovers.
Why not return quietly to the known road?

Why be a pilgrim still?
A voice they knew called to them, saying:

This is Trasna, the crossing place.
Choose! Go back if you must,

You will find your way easily by
yesterday's fires,
there may be life in the embers yet.

If that is not your deep desire,
Stand still. Lay down your load.

Take your life firmly in your two hands,
(Gently... you are trusted with something
precious)

While you search your heart's yearnings:
What am I seeking? What is my quest?

When your star rises deep within,
Trust yourself to its leading.

You will have the light for first steps.
This is Trasna, the crossing place.

Choose!
This is Trasna, the crossing place.

Mary T Barron, OLA

Welcome Address



It is my privilege to welcome you all to this SEDOS Residential Seminar which we are beginning this evening and which will continue until Friday. Welcome to each and every one of you who

gathered here in presence to participate, in this beautiful setting in Nemi. Welcome also to those who are joining us online from various parts of the world.

Our topic for the week is a very interesting one:

“The Changing Landscape of Missionary Religious Life”.

Each day we will be invited to focus on a different dimension of this theme.

Tomorrow, Tuesday, the theological foundation for mission in this changing landscape will be explored.

On Wednesday the focus will be on Governance and Finances while Thursday will highlight the changing landscape in the context of formation. Friday is a day reserved for sharing the learnings and insights of the week – you will hear a little more about that later as the week progresses.

Pope Francis, in an interview in 2018 stated ***“we are not living in an era of change but in a change of era.”***

The Pope's statement suggests that the changes taking place in society, technology, and politics are not simply a continuation of existing trends or a natural evolution of human progress. Instead, he suggests that we are witnessing a fundamental shift in the way that people live and interact with each other.

This change of era is characterized by a number of key trends, including globalization, technological innovation, climate change, and

social inequality, trends that are reshaping the world in ways that are difficult to predict or fully understand. Pope Francis' statement reflects a deep concern about the direction of society and the need for bold action to address the challenges facing humanity. As missionaries, we are all called to be prophetic at the forefront of this bold action.

Just as society has changed and is changing, it is clear there are different ways that the landscape of mission has changed and is changing... This is a vast topic... and we look forward to hearing from each of our contributors how they locate and describe the changing landscape from their specific perspectives...

Permit me in just a few introductory words to reflect on what the title itself might mean

The Changing Landscape

Of course, the term itself comes from nature, from geography ...

Coming from a country like Ireland, I have been blessed with exposure to a wonderful variety of beautiful landscapes that are ever changing...

I grew up looking out on a beautiful vista that included hills and distant mountains – but this landscape appeared to change depending on the season and even the time of day... on the everchanging weather conditions that we have in Ireland...

These changes depend very much on the prevailing weather conditions inhibiting the ability to see the landscape and so these changes could be described as transient... .. but other factors have also changed the landscape – different farming policies influencing the colour and shape of the land... also transient changes, while others are more permanent such as the construction of new buildings and roads dotted along the landscape...

These changes I am describing are quite superficial because in many ways the underlying landscape has remained the same –

what changes are the transient conditions that hide the landscape from view ...

Nature also undergoes profound landscape changes which can inform our reflections...

Let us take a moment to look at the factors that influence these more permanent changes in landscapes that occur in nature - what is technically termed 'geomorphology'?

I am not an expert in geography or geomorphology but I have it on authority that

Landscapes are created and changed by exogenic and endogenic processes acting along the interface between the lithosphere and the atmosphere and hydrosphere.

For those of us who need a little revision on the geographical terms,

The ***lithosphere*** is the hard crust of earth or any other planet.

The ***hydrosphere*** relates to everything to do with water

The ***Atmosphere*** concerns the gases that surround the planet

Exogenic forces are those that come from outside of the Earth's crust. They include weathering, erosion, and deposition. Weathering is the process by which rocks are broken down into smaller pieces by physical, chemical, or biological means. This can happen due to temperature changes, water, wind, or living

organisms. Erosion is the process by which these smaller pieces of rock are transported from one place to another by water, wind, or ice. Deposition occurs when these smaller pieces of rock settle in a new location.

Endogenic forces are those that come from within the Earth's crust. They include tectonic activity and volcanic eruptions. Tectonic activity refers to the movement of plates in the Earth's crust. When plates move apart, they create rifts and valleys. When plates collide, they create mountains and earthquakes. Volcanic eruptions occur when magma from deep within the Earth rises to the surface and erupts as lava or ash.

The effects of these forces can be seen all around us. Mountains are formed by tectonic activity and erosion over millions of years. Canyons are formed by rivers cutting through rock over time. Beaches are formed by deposition of sand and other materials along shorelines.

Landscapes are therefore dynamic, acutely sensitive to natural and artificial perturbations. The changing of landscapes is a natural process which can happen very slowly over time or which can happen explosively.

Often, landscapes of greatest scenic attraction are those whose creation were strongly dominated or rocked by special events.

From our location here in Nemi. We have a view of the beautiful lake which is a volcanic lake... the crater left by this formerly active

volcano filled up with water forming this lake which has completely changed the landscape of the area... and I think we can all agree it is a beautiful feature of this area...

Nature has been changing landscapes for billions of years. However, as well as creating landscapes of astounding beauty, these natural processes can also have negative impacts. Coastal erosion can threaten homes and businesses along



shorelines. Landslides can cause damage to roads and buildings on hillsides. Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes can cause widespread destruction and loss of life. Understanding these processes enables communities to prepare for and develop prevention measures to avoid natural disasters...

After this brief foray into geographical examples of landscape changes, let us return to the focus of this seminar – the Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life and unpack this a little.

There are two very important dimensions for consideration here – Religious and Missionary....

The Catholic Church has a long and rich history of religious life, with men and women devoting themselves to God through various forms of consecrated life. However, in recent years, we have seen significant changes in this landscape, both in terms of numbers and in the way religious life is lived.

I will not say too much on this dimension as no doubt Monsignor Carballo, our keynote speaker for this evening, will address it in great depth... Religious life is constantly evolving and shifting - there has been a significant drop in numbers since Vatican II - the way religious life is lived is also evolving and many religious communities are re-evaluating their approach to consecrated life by exploring new models of community living that allow for greater flexibility and adaptability. There have also been shifts in terms of the forms of ministry undertaken by religious men and women to respond to the needs of today's world.

In 2013 Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, wrote: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security." This call to engage with the world has been taken up by many religious, through different initiatives, finding new ways to serve those in need and to be a visible sign of God's love in the world. While the numbers of men and women entering religious life may be declining, there is a growing sense of creativity and adaptability among those who remain. As we

look to the future, and consider the current landscape and its imminent changes, it is clear that religious life will continue to evolve and adapt to the needs of the Church and the world. Hopefully in the next few days we will explore some of these changes and challenges...

The history of mission, even with the briefest consideration, reveals a landscape that has changed and evolved greatly over time.... In a very informative article written in 2017, Prof. Dries Vanysacker from Leuven, gives an overview of differing expressions of mission in the history of contemporary mission – so from the 1800's onwards...

At different junctures, different mission models were promoted, lived, experienced, contributing to a constantly evolving landscape of mission.

It is a given that early expressions of mission focussed on conversion and implantation approaches, with the aim of mission taken to be converting all to Christianity for the salvation of their souls and implanting the church in local contexts. I do not want to dwell too much on this historical expression of mission, I would prefer to focus instead on some of the landscape changes since Vatican II. But to set the context I will just mention that in these early models, there was great clarity around how mission territories were defined with geographical criteria and the non-Christian world central to these definitions. There was also great clarity around the agents of mission and missionaries were dispatched by specific missionary agencies from key geographical areas for the salvation of souls through conversion, and for the implantation of the Church.

Many of our Institutes were founded when these were the dominant models of mission...

Vatican II brought about a seismic shift in the understanding of the missionary nature of the Church which impacted the self-understanding of missionaries and their role in mission. From this point on there is greater openness towards other religions and cultures, in an ecumenical attitude and there is a rediscovery of the local churches as the primary agent of mission. This awareness has led to a fundamentally new interpretation of the purpose of mission and the role of missionaries and mission agencies.

As Vanysacker states, The council still affirmed that in the midst of these new circumstances and relationships there is still need for formation of experts or, rather, trained missionaries. But the missionaries are to recognize that their task pertains to the whole church, and they are to appreciate that they are sent as ambassadors of one local church to another local church (where such a local church already exists), as witnesses of solidarity and partnership, and as expressions of mutual encounter, exchange, and enrichment (AG 26).

The landscape continued to evolve post Vatican II and as Vanysacker describes, the landscape of mission has changed from conversion of the individual souls, to conversion of the people from outside the visible Church, to Church plantation, to adaptation, to inculturation, to indigenization, to contextualization, to interreligious dialogue, to ecumenism, to *missio Dei*, to human promotion, and to witness the Word of God, and the evolution of specialized missionaries “ad gentes” to new evangelizing and to the missionary task of proclaiming and witnessing of every disciple by baptism...

Different Pope’s in their different contexts highlighted different dimensions, through *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*. to *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Fast forward to our world of today and our current Pope, His Holiness Pope Francis. Mission or evangelization in the way it is presented in his Exhortation “*Evangelii gaudium*”, has no center and no periphery, since its center is everywhere and its periphery is nowhere. In other words, it is a mission from anywhere to everywhere and in every continent and indeed by the entire people of God wherever they are.¹”

The landscape of mission has greatly changed and is changing in terms of the ‘territory’ or geographical focus - from anywhere to everywhere.

The agents of mission – from specialized missionaries to all of the baptised...

The demography – while many missionary congregations and societies originated in the western hemisphere and membership of these groups were often limited to.

The ministries undertaken

Of course, the emphasis on journeying together as a Synodal Church is also impacting the landscape of religious missionary life...

As we follow the seminar throughout the week, in this beautiful setting of Nemi, we can look to nature to help us learn about and understand the changing landscape in our religious missionary life. Perhaps the landscape changes we are experiencing can be understood as natural processes that can be constructive or destructive...

- We may begin to understand what are the lithosphere, atmosphere and hydrosphere in our religious missionary world?
- What are the exogenic or external forces that impact changes in the landscape?
- What are the endogenic or the forces from within that are bringing about changes?
- What are the constructive changes that we need to embrace and develop?
- What are the destructive forces that we need to prepare for in order to be well prepared for or indeed avoid ‘natural disasters’?

Let us entrust our reflections on the changing landscapes and the emerging future to God in the sure knowledge that although as humans we may plan and prepare, it is God, the author of all mission who decides what will be done (cf. Proverbs 16:9).’

¹ Felix Wilfred, *Evangelii gaudium* – Reflections from Asia, *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 98 (2014), n°1-2, 138-141.

Msgr. José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM

Il Cambiamento del Paesaggio della Vita Religiosa Missionaria

Con riferimento al cambiamento demografico delle congregazioni religiose



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- Presentazione del tema
- Importanza della vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo
- Obiettivi dell'intervento

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2. Le principali caratteristiche della vita religiosa missionaria nel passato
3. L'importanza della vita religiosa missionaria per la diffusione del cristianesimo nel mondo

III. I cambiamenti del paesaggio della vita religiosa missionaria

1. I fattori che hanno portato ai cambiamenti nella vita religiosa missionaria
2. L'evoluzione della missione: dalle missioni "ad gentes" alle missioni "in situ"
3. Il cambiamento del rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie

4. La diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose e le conseguenze sulle attività missionarie

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1. La sfida della secolarizzazione e del pluralismo religioso
2. La sfida della globalizzazione e della mobilità umana
3. La sfida dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso
4. La risposta della vita religiosa missionaria a queste sfide, anche in relazione alla diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose

V. Conclusione

- Sintesi degli argomenti trattati
- Riflessioni finali sull'importanza della vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo, nonostante la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose
- Invito a una maggiore consapevolezza e impegno per la vita religiosa missionaria, anche alla luce della situazione attuale.

I. Introduzione

• Presentazione del tema

Il tema che andremo ad esplorare oggi riguarda il cambiamento del paesaggio della vita religiosa missionaria. In particolare, ci concentreremo sui fattori che hanno portato a questo cambiamento, l'evoluzione della

missione dalle missioni “ad gentes” alle missioni “in situ”, il rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie e la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose e le conseguenze sulle attività missionarie. Insieme esploreremo le sfide che la vita religiosa missionaria deve affrontare oggi, tra cui la secolarizzazione, il pluralismo religioso, la globalizzazione, l'inculturazione e il dialogo interreligioso, nonostante la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose. Infine, ci chiederemo quale sia l'importanza della vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo e come possiamo tutti contribuire a una maggiore consapevolezza e impegno per sostenere questa importante missione.

• **Importanza della vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo**

La vita religiosa missionaria nella Chiesa Cattolica ha un'importanza cruciale nel mondo contemporaneo. In un'epoca in cui la globalizzazione e la modernità spingono molte persone a cercare il successo e il benessere personale, la vita missionaria rappresenta un richiamo alla carità, all'umiltà e alla dedizione verso gli altri.

La missione cristiana è basata sull'amore di Dio e del prossimo, e sulla condivisione della fede attraverso la testimonianza personale e l'evangelizzazione. Questo richiede un grande impegno e sacrificio personale, ma è anche fonte di grande gioia e gratificazione, poiché la missione missionaria consente ai cristiani di scoprire la bellezza della diversità culturale e di imparare a rispettare e valorizzare gli altri. La Chiesa Cattolica, attraverso le sue

numerose congregazioni missionarie, opera in molti paesi del mondo per promuovere la pace, la giustizia sociale, l'educazione e lo sviluppo umano integrale. Le attività missionarie includono la cura dei malati, l'assistenza ai poveri, la difesa

dei diritti umani, l'aiuto alle vittime di conflitti e calamità naturali, e molte altre forme di servizio alla comunità.

In un mondo che spesso sembra diviso e in conflitto, la vita religiosa missionaria offre un'opportunità unica di promuovere la pace, la giustizia e la solidarietà. I missionari vivono tra le persone, condividono le loro gioie e dolori e si impegnano a servirle in modo concreto. Questo approccio umile e solidale è un esempio vivo dell'amore di Dio per tutti gli esseri umani, senza distinzione di razza, cultura o religione.

Inoltre, la vita religiosa missionaria rappresenta una risposta concreta alla chiamata di Gesù di “andare e fare discepoli in tutte le nazioni”. I missionari portano la fede cristiana in luoghi dove la presenza della Chiesa è scarsa o addirittura assente, condividendo con gli altri la bellezza e la verità del Vangelo. In questo modo, la vita religiosa missionaria contribuisce alla crescita della comunità cristiana globale, creando ponti di solidarietà e di amicizia tra le diverse culture e tradizioni.

Infine, la vita religiosa missionaria offre anche un'opportunità di crescita e di santità per coloro che la abbracciano. I missionari sono chiamati a vivere in modo radicale il Vangelo, a sacrificarsi per gli altri e a testimoniare la presenza di Dio nel mondo. Questo stile di vita richiede una profonda spiritualità, una forte fede e una grande capacità di adattamento alle diverse situazioni e culture. Ma allo stesso

tempo, offre anche la gioia e la gratificazione di vedere il frutto del proprio lavoro, di servire gli altri e di sentirsi parte di una grande famiglia globale.

In sintesi, la vita religiosa missionaria rappresenta una risposta concreta alla chiamata di

Gesù di amare il prossimo come se stessi, di diffondere la parola di Dio e di costruire ponti di solidarietà e di amicizia tra le diverse culture e tradizioni. Nel mondo contemporaneo, caratterizzato da divisioni e conflitti, la vita



religiosa missionaria offre un'opportunità di pace, di giustizia e di amore, testimoniando la presenza di Dio nel mondo e offrendo un esempio di vita radicale e di santità.

• **Obiettivi dell'intervento**

1. Fornire una panoramica storica della vita religiosa missionaria per comprendere l'importanza della missione nella diffusione del cristianesimo nel mondo.
2. Analizzare i fattori che hanno portato ai cambiamenti nella vita religiosa missionaria e le conseguenti evoluzioni delle attività missionarie.
3. Esaminare le sfide della vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo, in particolare in relazione alla secolarizzazione, al pluralismo religioso, alla globalizzazione, alla mobilità umana, all'inculturazione e al dialogo interreligioso.
4. Valutare le possibili risposte alla diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose e alle sfide della missione nella società contemporanea.

In sintesi, l'obiettivo principale dell'intervento è di analizzare come la vita religiosa missionaria si è evoluta nel corso del tempo e come sta cercando di rispondere alle sfide della società contemporanea, al fine di continuare a diffondere il messaggio cristiano e di portare il Vangelo in tutto il mondo.

II. La Vita Religiosa Missionaria nel Passato

II.1. Breve Rassegna Storica della Vita Religiosa Missionaria

La Chiesa cattolica ha una lunga storia di diffusione del messaggio evangelico in tutto il mondo, che risale all'epoca degli Apostoli:

- **Epoca apostolica:** gli Apostoli, dopo la Pentecoste, si sono impegnati a diffondere il Vangelo in tutto il mondo. San Paolo, in particolare, ha svolto un ruolo di primo piano nella diffusione del cristianesimo nell'Impero Romano, attraverso i suoi viaggi missionari e le sue lettere ai cristiani delle varie comunità.
- **Età medievale:** nel corso dell'Alto Medioevo, le missioni cristiane sono state

compiute soprattutto dai monaci e dai vescovi. Tra i più noti missionari medievali si possono citare San Bonifacio, che ha diffuso il cristianesimo tra i Germani, e San Cirillo e San Metodio, che hanno portato il messaggio cristiano in Europa orientale, inventando anche l'alfabeto cirillico.

- **Età moderna:** nel corso dell'età moderna, molte congregazioni religiose si sono dedicate alla missione ad gentes. In particolare, i Gesuiti hanno giocato un ruolo di primo piano nella diffusione del cristianesimo in Asia e in America latina. Nell'età moderna, molti missionari cattolici hanno dedicato la loro vita all'evangelizzazione dei popoli di India, Cina e Giappone. Di seguito trovi alcuni dei maggiori evangelizzatori missionari in queste tre nazioni:
 - In India: San Francesco Saverio: il più noto dei missionari cattolici in India, è stato un membro fondatore dell'ordine dei Gesuiti. È stato il primo missionario ad arrivare in Giappone e ha trascorso molti anni a diffondere il cristianesimo in India, dove ha fondato numerose comunità cristiane. È considerato il patrono delle missioni cattoliche.
 - In Cina: San Matteo Ricci: gesuita italiano, è stato uno dei primi missionari cattolici a entrare in Cina, nel 1582. Ha imparato la lingua e la cultura cinese e ha cercato di avvicinare il cristianesimo alla filosofia cinese. Ha anche creato un atlante del mondo in cinese, che gli ha permesso di diffondere la conoscenza geografica del mondo occidentale in Cina.
 - In Giappone: San Francesco Saverio: oltre ad essere un importante missionario in India, è stato il primo missionario ad arrivare in Giappone, nel 1549. Ha diffuso il cristianesimo in Giappone, creando numerose comunità cristiane e convertendo molti fedeli.
 - San Giovanni Battista Scalabrini: missionario italiano, è stato uno dei fondatori dell'ordine

dei Missionari Scalabriniani. Ha trascorso molti anni in Giappone, dove ha diffuso il cristianesimo tra la popolazione giapponese. Ha anche fondato numerose scuole e ospedali per aiutare la popolazione locale.

- In generale, i missionari cattolici in India, Cina e Giappone hanno affrontato molte difficoltà nella diffusione del messaggio cristiano, dovute alla diversità culturale e religiosa dei popoli locali. Tuttavia, grazie alla loro dedizione e alla loro conoscenza della lingua e della cultura locali, sono riusciti a creare numerose comunità cristiane



e a convertire molti fedeli.

- **Età contemporanea:** oggi, la Chiesa cattolica continua a diffondere il messaggio evangelico in tutto il mondo attraverso varie modalità, tra cui la missione ad gentes, il dialogo interreligioso e l'opera di aiuto ai poveri e ai bisognosi. Inoltre, molti religiosi cattolici sono impegnati in attività di evangelizzazione attraverso i mezzi di comunicazione di massa, come la radio, la televisione e Internet.

In generale, la Chiesa cattolica ha sempre considerato la diffusione del messaggio evangelico come un compito essenziale della sua missione, e ha sviluppato varie modalità per portare il Vangelo a tutti i popoli della terra.

II.2. Le principali caratteristiche della vita religiosa missionaria nel passato

La vita religiosa missionaria nel passato in ambito cattolico è stata caratterizzata da alcune principali caratteristiche, tra cui:

1. Dedizione alla diffusione del messaggio cristiano: i missionari cattolici erano impegnati nella diffusione del Vangelo e nella conversione di popoli non cristiani, sia in terre lontane che nei paesi europei.
2. Vita comunitaria e regole di vita severe: i missionari vivevano in comunità, spesso in luoghi isolati e difficili da raggiungere, e seguivano regole di vita severe, che comprendevano preghiere, digiuni e lavori manuali.
3. Apprendimento delle lingue e delle culture locali: per poter diffondere il messaggio cristiano, i missionari dovevano conoscere le lingue e le culture dei popoli che incontravano. Questo implicava spesso l'apprendimento di lingue straniere e la conoscenza delle usanze e delle tradizioni locali.
4. Creazione di strutture sociali e religiose: i missionari cattolici non si limitavano alla diffusione del messaggio cristiano, ma creavano anche strutture sociali e religiose come scuole, ospedali, orfanotrofi e seminari per la formazione di nuovi sacerdoti e missionari.
5. Sacrificio personale: i missionari cattolici spesso si imbarcavano in viaggi pericolosi e difficili, lasciando le loro famiglie e la loro terra natale per dedicarsi alla missione. In alcuni casi, questo implicava anche il sacrificio della loro stessa vita.

In sintesi, la vita religiosa missionaria nel passato in ambito cattolico era caratterizzata da una forte dedizione alla diffusione del messaggio cristiano, una vita comunitaria rigorosa, l'apprendimento delle lingue e delle culture locali, la creazione di strutture sociali e religiose, e il sacrificio personale.

II.3. L'importanza della vita religiosa missionaria per la diffusione del cristianesimo nel mondo

La vita religiosa missionaria ha svolto un ruolo fondamentale nella diffusione del cristianesimo in tutto il mondo. Grazie all'impegno e alla dedizione dei missionari, il messaggio cristiano è stato portato in terre lontane, permettendo a molte persone di conoscere e accettare la fede cristiana.

Senza la vita religiosa missionaria, la diffusione del cristianesimo sarebbe stata molto limitata, soprattutto nei paesi che non avevano avuto contatti diretti con la tradizione cristiana. Senza i missionari, molte culture e popoli non avrebbero mai conosciuto la fede cristiana, e le comunità cristiane sarebbero rimaste circoscritte alle regioni in cui erano nate.

Inoltre, la vita religiosa missionaria ha contribuito alla creazione di strutture sociali e religiose, come scuole, ospedali e orfanotrofi, che hanno avuto un impatto positivo sulla vita delle persone che ne hanno beneficiato.

In sintesi, la vita religiosa missionaria ha svolto un ruolo fondamentale nella diffusione del cristianesimo nel mondo, portando il messaggio cristiano in terre lontane e contribuendo alla creazione di strutture sociali e religiose che hanno migliorato la vita delle persone. Senza la vita religiosa missionaria, il cristianesimo sarebbe rimasto confinato alle regioni in cui era nato, e molte persone non avrebbero mai avuto l'opportunità di conoscere la fede cristiana.

III. I Cambiamenti del Paesaggio della Vita Religiosa Missionaria

III.1. I fattori che hanno portato ai cambiamenti nella vita religiosa missionaria.

La vita religiosa missionaria è stata profondamente influenzata da una serie di fattori che hanno portato a cambiamenti significativi nel corso degli ultimi decenni. Questi fattori sono stati determinanti per la crescita e la trasformazione della missione religiosa, sia a livello individuale che collettivo. Uno dei fattori principali che ha influenzato la vita religiosa missionaria è stato il cambiamento nei valori sociali e culturali. Nel corso degli ultimi decenni, la società ha visto una crescente

attenzione verso la diversità culturale e la tolleranza verso le diverse credenze religiose. Questo cambiamento ha influenzato la missione religiosa, spingendo i missionari a sviluppare una maggiore comprensione e rispetto per le culture e le tradizioni locali. Ciò ha portato a una maggiore collaborazione e partnership tra le comunità locali e le organizzazioni religiose.

Un altro fattore che ha influenzato la vita religiosa missionaria è stato lo sviluppo tecnologico. L'avvento di Internet e dei social media ha permesso ai missionari di raggiungere un pubblico più vasto e di condividere la loro missione con una maggiore efficacia. Inoltre, l'utilizzo di tecnologie avanzate ha permesso ai missionari di sviluppare nuovi metodi di evangelizzazione e di diffusione della fede.

Un terzo fattore che ha portato ai cambiamenti nella vita religiosa missionaria è stato l'aumento della consapevolezza ambientale e della sostenibilità. I missionari hanno iniziato a comprendere l'importanza della salvaguardia dell'ambiente e del rispetto per la natura, sviluppando così nuove iniziative e programmi ambientali. Ciò ha permesso ai missionari di diventare non solo attori della diffusione della fede, ma anche di promuovere il benessere della società e dell'ambiente.

Infine, un fattore chiave che ha portato ai cambiamenti nella vita religiosa missionaria è stato l'aumento della consapevolezza sulla questione dei diritti umani. I missionari hanno iniziato a riconoscere l'importanza di promuovere i diritti umani e di combattere l'ingiustizia e l'oppressione. Ciò ha portato alla creazione di nuovi programmi e iniziative finalizzati a sostenere i diritti umani e a promuovere l'uguaglianza tra le persone di diverse culture e religioni.

In sintesi, la vita religiosa missionaria ha subito cambiamenti significativi negli ultimi decenni, influenzati da una serie di fattori come il cambiamento dei valori sociali e culturali, lo sviluppo tecnologico, l'aumento della consapevolezza ambientale e dei diritti umani. Tuttavia, nonostante questi cambiamenti, la missione religiosa rimane un importante mezzo per promuovere la pace e la giustizia, la solidarietà e l'armonia tra i popoli del mondo.

III.2. L'evoluzione della missione: dalle missioni "ad gentes" alle missioni "in situ"

La missione religiosa ha subito un'evoluzione significativa nel corso degli ultimi decenni, passando dalle missioni "ad gentes" alle missioni "in situ". Questo cambiamento ha avuto un impatto profondo sulla pratica della missione religiosa e sul modo in cui le organizzazioni religiose operano in tutto il mondo.

Le missioni "ad gentes" erano un modello di missione religiosa che si concentrava sulla diffusione della fede tra le popolazioni che non erano ancora state raggiunte dalla presenza della chiesa. Questo modello di missione è stato molto diffuso in epoche passate, soprattutto durante l'epoca coloniale, quando i missionari europei si sono spostati in tutto il mondo per diffondere il cristianesimo tra le popolazioni indigene.

Tuttavia, negli ultimi decenni, la missione religiosa ha subito una profonda trasformazione. Invece di concentrarsi solo sulla diffusione della fede tra le popolazioni non raggiunte, le organizzazioni religiose hanno iniziato a concentrarsi sulla promozione della fede all'interno delle comunità locali, attraverso le missioni "in situ".

Le missioni "in situ" si concentrano sulla diffusione della fede tra le persone che vivono all'interno delle comunità locali, promuovendo l'interazione e il dialogo tra persone di diverse religioni e culture. Questo modello di missione religiosa si basa sulla costruzione di relazioni tra le persone e sulla promozione del rispetto reciproco.

Uno dei vantaggi delle missioni "in situ" è che esse promuovono una maggiore comprensione e rispetto per le culture e le tradizioni locali, favorendo così la collaborazione e la partnership tra le comunità locali e le organizzazioni religiose. Inoltre, le missioni "in situ" consentono ai missionari di diventare parte integrante delle comunità locali, comprendendone i bisogni e le esigenze, e di sviluppare un'azione concreta per migliorare la qualità della vita delle persone.

In conclusione, l'evoluzione della missione religiosa dalle missioni "ad gentes" alle

missioni "in situ" ha portato a una maggiore comprensione e rispetto per le culture e le tradizioni locali, favorendo la collaborazione e la partnership tra le comunità locali e le organizzazioni religiose. Questo nuovo modello di missione religiosa consente ai missionari di diventare parte integrante delle comunità locali, comprendendone i bisogni e le esigenze, e di sviluppare un'azione concreta per migliorare la qualità della vita delle persone.

III.3. Il cambiamento del rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie

Il rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie è cambiato significativamente nel corso degli ultimi decenni. In passato, le istituzioni religiose missionarie erano spesso viste come le uniche entità in grado di diffondere la fede in regioni remote e poco sviluppate, e quindi godevano di una grande autorità sulla Chiesa locale.

Tuttavia, negli ultimi anni, il rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie è cambiato notevolmente. La Chiesa locale è diventata sempre più indipendente e ha assunto un ruolo più attivo nella diffusione della fede nelle proprie comunità, senza la necessità di affidarsi alle istituzioni religiose missionarie.

In particolare, questo cambiamento è stato favorito dalla promozione di un approccio più dialogico e collaborativo tra le istituzioni religiose missionarie e la Chiesa locale. Le istituzioni religiose missionarie hanno iniziato a lavorare in partnership con le Chiese locali, fornendo supporto e risorse per lo sviluppo della fede nelle comunità locali, anziché cercare di



controllare l'intero processo di diffusione della fede.

Questo cambiamento ha portato a una maggiore partecipazione e coinvolgimento delle comunità locali nella diffusione della fede, nonché a una maggiore responsabilità della Chiesa locale nella gestione delle sue attività religiose. Inoltre, ha permesso alle istituzioni religiose missionarie di avere una maggiore comprensione delle culture e delle tradizioni locali, favorendo così una maggiore rispetto reciproco e un dialogo interreligioso più profondo.

Inoltre, il cambiamento del rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie ha avuto un impatto significativo sul ruolo e l'approccio delle stesse istituzioni religiose missionarie. Invece di concentrarsi sulla diffusione della fede in regioni remote, le istituzioni religiose missionarie si sono concentrate sulla promozione della fede attraverso la formazione, l'educazione e l'assistenza alle comunità locali. Questo nuovo approccio ha permesso alle istituzioni religiose missionarie di svolgere un ruolo più significativo nella promozione della giustizia sociale e dell'uguaglianza.

In conclusione, il cambiamento del rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie ha portato a un approccio più dialogico e collaborativo nella diffusione della fede, favorendo una maggiore partecipazione delle comunità locali e una maggiore responsabilità della Chiesa locale nella gestione delle sue attività religiose. Questo nuovo approccio ha permesso alle istituzioni religiose missionarie di svolgere un ruolo più significativo nella promozione della giustizia sociale e dell'uguaglianza, attraverso la formazione, l'educazione e l'assistenza alle comunità locali.

Di seguito riporto alcuni esempi concreti del cambiamento del rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie:

1. Collaborazione tra Chiesa locale e istituzioni religiose missionarie nella promozione dell'educazione: In molti paesi in via di sviluppo, le istituzioni religiose missionarie hanno lavorato in partnership con le Chiese locali per promuovere l'educazione delle comunità locali, fornendo supporto

finanziario e risorse umane per la costruzione di scuole e l'organizzazione di programmi educativi.

2. Formazione di leader locali: Le istituzioni religiose missionarie hanno collaborato con le Chiese locali per formare leader locali in modo che possano assumere un ruolo più attivo nella diffusione della fede e nella gestione delle attività religiose. Ciò ha permesso alle comunità locali di avere maggiori responsabilità nella gestione delle loro attività religiose e di essere più indipendenti dalle istituzioni religiose missionarie.
3. Promozione della giustizia sociale: Le istituzioni religiose missionarie hanno iniziato a concentrarsi sulla promozione della giustizia sociale e dell'uguaglianza, attraverso la formazione, l'educazione e l'assistenza alle comunità locali. Ad esempio, molte istituzioni religiose missionarie hanno promosso la costruzione di infrastrutture sanitarie e la fornitura di cure mediche alle comunità locali, in collaborazione con le Chiese locali.
4. Dialogo interreligioso: Le istituzioni religiose missionarie hanno lavorato in partnership con le Chiese locali per promuovere il dialogo interreligioso e la comprensione reciproca tra le diverse religioni e culture presenti nelle comunità locali. Ciò ha favorito una maggiore comprensione e rispetto reciproco, e ha permesso alle istituzioni religiose missionarie di comprendere meglio le esigenze e le aspettative delle comunità locali.

In generale, questi esempi dimostrano come la collaborazione tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie possa portare a risultati positivi nella promozione della fede e della giustizia sociale. Il nuovo approccio più dialogico e collaborativo ha permesso alle istituzioni religiose missionarie di avere una maggiore comprensione delle culture e delle tradizioni locali, favorendo così una maggiore rispetto reciproco e un dialogo interreligioso più profondo.

III.4. La diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose e le conseguenze sulle attività Missionarie

La diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose rappresenta un problema per le attività missionarie. Le congregazioni religiose hanno tradizionalmente svolto un ruolo cruciale nella diffusione della fede e nell'organizzazione di attività missionarie in tutto il mondo. Tuttavia, negli ultimi decenni, molte di queste congregazioni hanno visto diminuire il numero dei propri membri, e questo ha avuto un impatto significativo sulle attività missionarie.

Una delle conseguenze più evidenti della diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose è la riduzione del numero di missionari disponibili per svolgere attività missionarie in tutto il mondo. Con meno missionari a disposizione, le attività missionarie si sono inevitabilmente ridotte, il che ha avuto un impatto negativo sulla diffusione della fede e sulla promozione di attività sociali e di sviluppo nelle comunità locali.

Inoltre, la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose ha portato a una diminuzione delle risorse finanziarie a disposizione per le attività missionarie. Molte congregazioni religiose hanno storicamente fornito finanziamenti per la costruzione di scuole, ospedali, orfanotrofi e altri progetti sociali nelle comunità locali. Tuttavia, con la diminuzione del numero dei membri, c'è meno disponibilità di risorse finanziarie per sostenere queste attività.

La diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose ha anche avuto un impatto sulla formazione dei missionari. Molte congregazioni religiose avevano storicamente scuole e programmi di formazione per i propri membri interessati a diventare missionari. Con meno membri, questi programmi di formazione sono diventati sempre più limitati, e ciò ha avuto un impatto negativo sulla qualità e sulla quantità dei missionari formati.

Tuttavia, nonostante queste sfide, molte congregazioni religiose si stanno adattando alla situazione. Molte stanno lavorando per reclutare nuovi membri, offrendo programmi di formazione e di supporto ai giovani interessati a diventare missionari. Altre stanno cercando

nuovi modi per finanziare le attività missionarie, ad esempio attraverso la collaborazione con organizzazioni non governative e altri partner della società civile. Inoltre, alcune congregazioni stanno esplorando nuove modalità di evangelizzazione, ad esempio attraverso l'utilizzo dei mezzi di comunicazione digitale.

In sintesi, la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose rappresenta una sfida significativa per le attività missionarie. Tuttavia, con la volontà di adattarsi e di innovare, molte congregazioni stanno cercando di superare queste sfide, continuando a svolgere un ruolo cruciale nella diffusione della fede e nella promozione del bene comune nelle comunità locali in tutto il mondo.

Ecco alcuni esempi concreti di come la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose abbia influenzato le attività missionarie:

1. Riduzione del numero di missionari: con meno membri nelle congregazioni religiose, c'è meno disponibilità di missionari da inviare in tutto il mondo. Ad esempio, la Società per le Missioni Estere di Parigi, una delle più antiche organizzazioni missionarie cattoliche al mondo, ha visto il numero dei suoi missionari diminuire del 40% negli ultimi 20 anni.
2. Riduzione delle risorse finanziarie: molte congregazioni religiose hanno storicamente fornito finanziamenti per sostenere attività missionarie, come la costruzione di scuole, ospedali e orfanotrofi. Tuttavia, con la diminuzione del numero dei membri, c'è meno disponibilità di risorse finanziarie per sostenere queste attività. Ad esempio, la Congregazione delle Suore della Carità di San Carlo Borromeo, un'organizzazione missionaria cattolica, ha dovuto chiudere alcune delle sue scuole in Africa a causa della riduzione delle risorse finanziarie.
3. Riduzione dei programmi di formazione: molte congregazioni religiose avevano storicamente scuole e programmi di formazione per i propri membri interessati a diventare missionari. Con meno membri,

questi programmi di formazione sono diventati sempre più limitati, e ciò ha avuto un impatto negativo sulla qualità e sulla quantità dei missionari formati. Ad esempio, la Congregazione delle Missionarie della Fede, un'organizzazione missionaria cattolica, ha visto il numero dei suoi membri diminuire del 60% negli ultimi 20 anni, il che ha avuto un impatto sulla capacità dell'organizzazione di formare nuovi missionari.

4. **Innovazione nelle modalità di evangelizzazione:** molte congregazioni religiose stanno cercando nuove modalità di evangelizzazione per superare la diminuzione demografica dei membri. Ad esempio, alcune organizzazioni missionarie stanno utilizzando i mezzi di comunicazione digitale, come i social media, per raggiungere un pubblico più ampio. Altre organizzazioni stanno collaborando con organizzazioni non governative e altri partner della società civile per sostenere le loro attività missionarie. Ad esempio, la Missione Cattolica Italiana di Zurigo collabora con una serie di organizzazioni non governative per sostenere le attività di assistenza e sviluppo in Africa e in Asia.

IV. Le Sfide della Vita Religiosa Missionaria nel Mondo Contemporaneo

IV. 1. La sfida della secolarizzazione e del pluralismo religioso

La secolarizzazione e il pluralismo religioso sono due sfide significative per la vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo. La secolarizzazione si riferisce alla tendenza in cui la religione sta perdendo il suo posto di rilievo nella vita pubblica e privata, mentre il pluralismo religioso si riferisce alla presenza di molte religioni diverse in una stessa società. Queste due sfide hanno un impatto significativo sulla vita religiosa missionaria, poiché richiedono un cambiamento di approccio per raggiungere e interagire con le persone in tutto il mondo.

In passato, la vita religiosa missionaria si concentrava principalmente sulla diffusione

della propria fede e sulla conversione di nuovi membri. Tuttavia, la secolarizzazione e il pluralismo religioso hanno reso difficile questo approccio tradizionale. Le persone sono sempre meno interessate alla religione, e la presenza di molte religioni diverse in una stessa società può portare a conflitti tra gruppi religiosi e a una maggiore pressione per la tolleranza e l'inclusione.

Per affrontare queste sfide, la vita religiosa missionaria deve adottare un nuovo approccio che valorizzi il dialogo interreligioso e la cooperazione con le altre religioni. Questo significa che le organizzazioni missionarie devono concentrarsi non solo sulla conversione, ma anche sulla promozione della comprensione e del rispetto reciproco tra le religioni. Devono anche lavorare per promuovere la giustizia sociale e la pace, e per supportare le comunità più vulnerabili.

Inoltre, la vita religiosa missionaria deve adattarsi alle nuove esigenze della società moderna, come la povertà, la disuguaglianza, la violenza e l'ingiustizia. Le organizzazioni missionarie possono svolgere un ruolo importante nella promozione della giustizia sociale e della pace, e nel supporto delle comunità più vulnerabili.

Inoltre, la vita religiosa missionaria deve lavorare per superare i pregiudizi e gli stereotipi che circondano le diverse religioni. Le organizzazioni missionarie devono educare i propri membri sulla diversità religiosa e incoraggiarli a rispettare le credenze degli altri. In questo modo, le organizzazioni missionarie possono diventare un modello positivo di convivenza pacifica e di rispetto reciproco tra le religioni.

Infine, la vita religiosa missionaria deve utilizzare i mezzi di comunicazione moderni per raggiungere un pubblico più vasto e promuovere il dialogo interreligioso. Internet e i social media offrono una grande opportunità per le organizzazioni missionarie di raggiungere un pubblico globale e di promuovere la comprensione e il rispetto reciproco tra le religioni.

In sintesi, la secolarizzazione e il pluralismo religioso rappresentano una sfida significativa per la vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo. Tuttavia, queste sfide offrono anche opportunità per un nuovo approccio che

valorizzi il dialogo interreligioso, la cooperazione e la promozione della giustizia sociale e della pace. Le organizzazioni missionarie devono adattarsi alle nuove esigenze della società moderna e utilizzare i mezzi di comunicazione moderni per raggiungere un pubblico più vasto e promuovere il dialogo interreligioso.

IV. 2. La sfida della globalizzazione e della mobilità umana

La globalizzazione e la mobilità umana rappresentano una sfida significativa per la vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo. La globalizzazione ha reso il mondo più interconnesso e ha creato nuove sfide per le organizzazioni missionarie che cercano di diffondere la propria fede in un contesto globale. Inoltre, la mobilità umana ha portato alla creazione di comunità multietniche e multireligiose, che richiedono un approccio più inclusivo e sensibile.

La globalizzazione ha portato alla creazione di una società globale in cui le persone e le idee si muovono sempre più facilmente attraverso le frontiere nazionali. Tuttavia, questo ha anche creato sfide per le organizzazioni missionarie che cercano di diffondere la propria fede in un contesto globale. La globalizzazione ha portato alla creazione di una società sempre più pluralista, in cui le persone sono esposte a molte culture e religioni diverse. Questo ha reso più difficile per le organizzazioni missionarie raggiungere nuovi membri e diffondere la propria fede.

Inoltre, la mobilità umana ha portato alla creazione di comunità multietniche e multireligiose in cui le organizzazioni missionarie devono adottare un approccio più inclusivo e sensibile. Le organizzazioni

missionarie devono essere in grado di adattarsi alle diverse culture e alle diverse tradizioni religiose presenti in una comunità e di lavorare per promuovere il dialogo interreligioso e la comprensione reciproca.

Inoltre, la mobilità umana ha portato alla creazione di comunità di migranti che spesso vivono in situazioni di vulnerabilità. Le organizzazioni missionarie devono lavorare per aiutare queste comunità a superare le sfide che affrontano e per promuovere la giustizia sociale e la solidarietà.

Per affrontare la sfida della globalizzazione e della mobilità umana, la vita religiosa missionaria deve adottare un nuovo approccio basato sull'inclusione, sulla sensibilità culturale e sulla promozione del dialogo interreligioso. Le organizzazioni missionarie devono lavorare per comprendere le diverse culture e le diverse tradizioni religiose presenti in una comunità e devono essere in grado di adattarsi a queste diversità.

Inoltre, le organizzazioni missionarie devono lavorare per promuovere la giustizia sociale e la solidarietà tra le comunità, specialmente quelle più vulnerabili. Devono anche utilizzare i mezzi di comunicazione moderni per raggiungere un

pubblico globale e per promuovere la comprensione reciproca tra le diverse culture e le diverse tradizioni religiose.

Infine, la vita religiosa missionaria deve adattarsi alle nuove esigenze della società globale, sviluppando

nuove strategie per raggiungere nuovi membri e per diffondere la propria fede in un contesto globale. Questo significa che le organizzazioni missionarie devono utilizzare le tecnologie moderne e le reti sociali per raggiungere un pubblico più vasto e per promuovere la



comprensione reciproca tra le diverse culture e le diverse tradizioni religiose.

In conclusione, la globalizzazione e la mobilità umana rappresentano una grande sfida per la vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo. Gli ordini religiosi e le istituzioni missionarie sono chiamati a rivedere il loro modo di operare e di pensare, adattandosi ai cambiamenti del mondo e ai nuovi bisogni delle popolazioni. È fondamentale sviluppare una cultura dell'incontro e dell'accoglienza, che sappia valorizzare la diversità culturale e religiosa, promuovendo il dialogo interreligioso e la cooperazione tra le diverse fedi. Solo in questo modo si potrà rispondere alle sfide della globalizzazione e della mobilità umana, offrendo una testimonianza autentica di amore, di servizio e di solidarietà alle persone e alle comunità che si incontrano lungo il cammino della missione.

IV.3. La sfida dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso

La sfida dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso rappresenta una delle maggiori sfide per la vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo. La crescente globalizzazione e il diffondersi del pluralismo religioso impongono alle comunità religiose di adattarsi alle nuove realtà culturali e di sviluppare un atteggiamento di apertura e dialogo.

L'inculturazione si riferisce alla capacità di far dialogare il Vangelo con la cultura e le tradizioni locali. Ciò implica l'adozione di un approccio flessibile e rispettoso delle culture e delle tradizioni, cercando di valorizzarle piuttosto che sopprimerle. È necessario, quindi, formare missionari in grado di comprendere le realtà locali, rispettando le differenze e promuovendo l'inclusione.

Il dialogo interreligioso, invece, è un processo di scambio e confronto tra le diverse tradizioni religiose, che permette di conoscere meglio l'altro e di superare le differenze. Anche in questo caso, è importante sviluppare una mentalità di apertura e di ascolto reciproco, evitando il sincretismo e la confusione tra le diverse fedi.

Tuttavia, la sfida dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso richiede tempo, sforzo e dedizione. Richiede la formazione di missionari in grado di comprendere e rispettare le diverse

culture, di dialogare con le diverse fedi e di essere testimoni autentici di amore, di pace e di solidarietà. Solo attraverso questo approccio di dialogo e di apertura si potrà costruire un mondo più giusto, pacifico e fraterno, dove le diversità culturali e religiose non sono più viste come una minaccia, ma come una ricchezza e un'opportunità di crescita.

Ci sono molte esperienze positive di inculturazione e dialogo interreligioso che hanno avuto luogo in diverse parti del mondo.

Ad esempio, in alcune parti dell'Africa, le comunità cristiane e musulmane hanno sviluppato un forte senso di collaborazione e solidarietà. In molte regioni del continente, queste comunità si impegnano insieme per la costruzione di scuole, ospedali e altre strutture sociali, a beneficio di tutta la popolazione locale.

Anche in Asia, esistono numerose esperienze di dialogo interreligioso, soprattutto tra cristiani, buddisti, induisti e musulmani. In alcune città del continente, le comunità religiose hanno formato gruppi interreligiosi per promuovere la pace, il rispetto e la comprensione reciproca.

Inoltre, molte congregazioni religiose hanno adottato un approccio di inculturazione nei loro sforzi missionari. Ad esempio, i missionari cattolici che lavorano in America Latina cercano di integrarsi nelle comunità locali e di comprendere le loro tradizioni culturali, allo stesso tempo che offrono un messaggio di speranza e di fede.

In sintesi, ci sono molti esempi concreti di come la sfida dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso possa essere affrontata con successo, grazie alla dedizione e all'impegno di missionari e di comunità religiose in tutto il mondo.

IV.4. La risposta della vita religiosa missionaria a queste sfide, anche in relazione alla diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose

La vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di rispondere alle sfide della secolarizzazione, del pluralismo religioso, della globalizzazione, dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso, anche in relazione alla diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose.

In risposta alla sfida della secolarizzazione, la vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di

rinnovarsi e di adattarsi alle nuove esigenze della società. Molte congregazioni hanno avviato programmi di formazione e di educazione per aiutare i giovani a sviluppare una fede matura e consapevole, in grado di affrontare le sfide della vita contemporanea.

Per quanto riguarda la sfida del pluralismo religioso, la vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di promuovere il dialogo e la collaborazione tra le diverse religioni. Molte congregazioni hanno avviato programmi di formazione e di educazione interreligiosa, per aiutare i cristiani e i membri di altre religioni a comprendere meglio le rispettive credenze e tradizioni.

In risposta alla sfida della globalizzazione e della mobilità umana, la vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di essere presente in luoghi dove c'è una maggiore necessità di assistenza spirituale e materiale. Molte congregazioni hanno aperto missioni in luoghi lontani, dove le persone sono esposte a gravi problemi sociali, economici e politici.

Per quanto riguarda la sfida dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso, la vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di integrarsi nelle

vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di fare il meglio con le risorse a disposizione, anche se spesso limitate. Molte congregazioni hanno cercato di creare reti di collaborazione e di condivisione con altre congregazioni, per poter continuare a svolgere il loro lavoro di evangelizzazione e di assistenza alle persone in difficoltà.

In sintesi, la vita religiosa missionaria ha cercato di rispondere alle sfide della secolarizzazione, del pluralismo religioso, della globalizzazione, dell'inculturazione e del dialogo interreligioso, anche in relazione alla diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose, cercando di rinnovarsi e di adattarsi alle nuove esigenze della società, pur mantenendo la propria identità e la propria missione.

V. Conclusioni

• Sintesi degli argomenti trattati

Il tema affrontato riguarda la vita religiosa missionaria, esaminando la sua evoluzione storica e le principali caratteristiche del passato,

così come l'importanza della missione nella diffusione del cristianesimo nel mondo. Successivamente, sono stati esaminati i fattori che hanno portato ai cambiamenti nella vita religiosa missionaria, tra cui l'evoluzione della missione stessa, il cambiamento del rapporto tra la Chiesa locale e le istituzioni religiose missionarie e la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose. Infine, sono state esaminate le sfide attuali che la vita religiosa

missionaria deve affrontare, tra cui la secolarizzazione, il pluralismo religioso, la globalizzazione, l'inculturazione e il dialogo interreligioso, nonché la risposta della vita religiosa missionaria a tali sfide.



comunità locali e di comprendere le loro tradizioni culturali. Molte congregazioni hanno cercato di adottare un approccio di inculturazione nei loro sforzi missionari, cercando di coniugare la loro fede con la cultura locale.

Infine, in relazione alla diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose, la

- **Riflessioni finali sull'importanza della vita religiosa missionaria nel mondo contemporaneo, nonostante la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose**

Nonostante la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose, la vita religiosa missionaria continua ad essere di fondamentale importanza nel mondo contemporaneo. La sua presenza è vitale per la promozione della pace, della giustizia e della solidarietà, così come per la diffusione della fede cristiana. La missione è stata storicamente una forma di servizio umano e spirituale che ha visto i missionari impegnati in attività di evangelizzazione, di aiuto alle comunità locali e di difesa dei diritti umani. Oggi, queste attività rimangono importanti, ma devono essere integrate con un approccio di inculturazione e dialogo interreligioso.

La sfida principale per la vita religiosa missionaria è quella di trovare nuove modalità di attività che siano pertinenti e rispondano ai bisogni dei popoli del mondo contemporaneo. Questo richiede una profonda riflessione sulle esigenze delle persone e sulle questioni che riguardano la giustizia sociale, l'ambiente, la pace e la dignità umana. La vita religiosa missionaria deve anche collaborare con le chiese locali e le organizzazioni della società civile per creare un'impostazione che abbia un impatto duraturo sulla società.

Un'altra sfida è quella di attirare nuove vocazioni e di formare missionari adeguati alle esigenze del mondo contemporaneo. La formazione dovrebbe essere più orientata alla pratica, con un'attenzione particolare alla formazione culturale e interculturale. La vita religiosa missionaria dovrebbe anche considerare di collaborare con le università e le scuole di formazione, così come con i movimenti e le organizzazioni giovanili, per attirare nuove vocazioni.

In definitiva, la vita religiosa missionaria continua ad essere un importante servizio alla Chiesa e al mondo, nonostante la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose. Ci sono molte sfide da affrontare, ma con l'aiuto dello Spirito Santo e la collaborazione tra le congregazioni religiose, le chiese locali e le organizzazioni della società civile, la missione può continuare ad essere una risposta concreta alle esigenze del mondo di oggi.

- **Invito a una maggiore consapevolezza e impegno per la vita religiosa missionaria, anche alla luce della situazione attuale.**

La vita religiosa missionaria rappresenta una realtà di grande importanza per la diffusione del messaggio evangelico nel mondo. Nonostante le sfide che essa ha dovuto affrontare nel corso degli anni, la sua presenza è ancora oggi fondamentale per portare la Parola di Dio a popoli e culture diverse.

Tuttavia, come abbiamo visto, la diminuzione demografica delle congregazioni religiose rappresenta una sfida significativa per la vita religiosa missionaria. È quindi necessario un impegno rinnovato per sostenere e promuovere la vita religiosa missionaria, sia attraverso la preghiera che con il sostegno concreto alle attività missionarie.

In particolare, l'invito a una maggiore consapevolezza riguarda la necessità di comprendere e accettare il pluralismo religioso e culturale del mondo contemporaneo. La vita religiosa missionaria deve saper dialogare con le altre religioni e culture, senza rinunciare alla propria identità cristiana, ma piuttosto arricchendosi della diversità degli altri.

Inoltre, è importante sostenere la formazione continua dei missionari, in modo che siano preparati ad affrontare le sfide del mondo contemporaneo, come la globalizzazione, la mobilità umana, la secolarizzazione e l'inculturazione. La formazione dovrebbe inoltre incentivare il dialogo interreligioso e la conoscenza delle altre culture.

Infine, l'invito a un maggiore impegno riguarda tutti i cristiani, perché la missione non è solo compito delle istituzioni religiose, ma di tutta la Chiesa. Ognuno è chiamato a portare il messaggio di Cristo alle persone che lo cercano, nelle proprie comunità e in tutto il mondo.

In sintesi, la vita religiosa missionaria continua ad essere di fondamentale importanza per la Chiesa e per il mondo, nonostante le sfide che deve affrontare. È necessario un impegno rinnovato per sostenere e promuovere la vita religiosa missionaria, attraverso una maggiore consapevolezza, formazione continua e un maggiore coinvolgimento di tutti i cristiani.

Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life

Governance/Leadership



I would like to congratulate SEDOS for organizing this residential seminar on a very important theme. I also thank you for

inviting me to share some ideas based on my experiences on the Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life: Governance/Leadership. Although my sharing refers to the situation of my congregation, the Society of the Divine Word, I hope that you will find some commonalities with yours. I want to divide my presentation into six parts, dealing with six changes.

1. Shift in the understanding religious life: towards the importance of community life

The provisions regarding the government of our Society in the revised version of our Constitutions (1968) start with the following statement: “Reverence for the personal dignity of each member is fundamental to all the administrative structures and procedures by which we seek to achieve the goals of our Society.” (601). Then it follows with the co-responsibility of every member emerging from such dignity, the principle of subsidiarity and solidarity etc. It seems that in the Spirit of Vatican II there was a need to stress on the respect of dignity of every member. In line with this, the General Chapter in 1968 decided to conduct for the whole Society a “Self-Study”, to get information about the theological and sociological climate of the confreres’ work, their qualifications and occupations, problems and possibilities, and alternatives for the future.¹

This emphasis on the personal dignity of every member was necessary to address the pre-Vatican II understanding of religious life where individuals were somehow lost in the community.

Almost 10 years later, there was a shift from the concentration on personal dignity to community life as the central point of leadership. The 1977 version of our Constitutions reads: “The whole meaning of authority in our Society lies in service to the community. Its task is: to inspire all confreres to live in such a way as befits their call to be missionaries of the Divine Word, to build up true community; to coordinate the varied undertakings in the provinces, local communities and individual confreres, and bring them into alignment with the goals of the Society; to represent the community and protect its interests, and to foster unity, peace and ready cooperation among all.” (601) After this statement, themes on personal dignity of every member, co-responsibility, the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity etc. were mentioned. This formulation is kept until now, with a slight change which gives emphasis on Jesus as the model of leadership in the present constitutions (1983/2000/2006). It says: “In our Society the use of authority should be modeled on the words and deeds of the Lord who came to serve and not to be served (see Mk 10:45). Likewise, the meaning of authority lies in service to the community. Its task is:

- to inspire all confreres to live in a way befitting their call as missionaries of the Divine Word;
- to build up true community;
- to coordinate the varied undertakings of provinces, local communities and individual confreres and bring them into line with the goals of the Society;
- to represent the community and protect its interests;

¹ Andrzej Miotk, *The General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word (1884-2012)*, Analecta SVD 95, Rome: SVD, 2016, p. 80.

- to foster unity, peace, and ready cooperation among all” (601).

For a Congregation like ours, where there is a big number of members living and working alone in parishes all over the world, leaders must promote community life; especially now that individualism has been entering very fast into the fibers of world system, and our religious missionary life, is not exempted from it. In the time when community life was quite commonly accepted and lived out, the emphasis was given to the fostering of the dignity of every member, creating space that every individual member can develop his personality. When individual freedom has become part of common awareness, we need to give more attention to keep the community life.

Leadership is crucial in keeping the spirit of unity of a religious missionary community. Religious life would lose its meaning, if there will be no more community. Our special contribution to the Church is in fact this aspect of community life.² Of course, community does not mean uniformity. There is always a need to give space for personal realization of each member and to develop their God-given talents because only then they can fully contribute to the good of the whole Congregation.

As a mixed clerical congregation, the rights and duties of the Brothers are an important issue. Until 1967 there was a separation between priest and brothers in work and some other aspects of community life.³ This caused psychological separation that eventually blocked communication and made interpersonal relationships difficult to live out. The Chapter of 1968 finally made a breakthrough when it decided that the Brothers in perpetual vows can now be elected as one of the delegates for a General Chapter. It is a provision in the norms for the General Chapter, that provinces that have 30 or more Brothers in perpetual vows, will have at least one Brother in their delegation to a General Chapter.⁴ The General Chapter in 1972 finally elected one Brother as member of the General Council. Since then, it has been the

practice to have a Brother in the General Council. At the level of provinces, where there is a big number of Brothers, we also try to appoint at least one of them as Council members. The General Council is serious and consistent regarding implementation of such norm. Once a province who has more than 30 Brothers in perpetual vows was asked to redo its chapter, it was because no Brother was elected as one of the delegates for the General Chapter.

For the past years, the SVD leadership team has joined other mixed clerical congregations in asking the Holy See to review and revise its policy about the appointment of Brothers as leaders in a mixed clerical congregation. Finally, with the decision of Pope Francis in May 2022, Brothers are now given the possibility to be elected to the leadership service, even as a Superior General.⁵ Such breakthrough in the whole Church gave us chance to consequently implement what is written in our constitutions - all the leadership service is open to all confreres in perpetual vows. Being a Priest or a Brother is no longer the decisive criteria for a confrere to be appointed superior. Now, for the first time in history we have a Brother Provincial and four as vice provincial/regional superior. This new regulation of Pope Francis is a crucial contribution in fighting against clericalism in male congregations. For us, the presence, and now the service of Brothers in the leadership reminds us that first of all, before being priests or Brothers, we are religious, and as such, we are brothers to one another and to the people of God. I am convinced that having equality for all the members is an important role of the leadership in a mixed clerical congregation.

In order to face this shift from concentration of the individual dignity to community life, wisdom on how to harmonize the space of an individual and space of community living is necessary for those in the leadership service.

2. Shift in the understanding of mission: prophetic dialogue

Our 15th General Chapter in 2000 is a milestone for our understanding of mission after the Vatican II. The mission of the Triune God or

² Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community*, "Congregavit Nos in Unum Christi Amor" (1994).

³ Andrzej Miotk, op.cit., p. 74.

⁴ Handbook for the Superiors, *Statutes XI*, 216, 322

⁵ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-05/pope-allows-non-clerics-to-be-major-superiors-in-certain-cases.html>

mission of God (*missio Dei*) was the basic concept of mission in this Chapter. And from this basic concept the chapter evolved the understanding of mission as prophetic dialogue. This General Chapter dealt with the question: What is the mission of the SVD in the new millennium? In the whole preparation, the strongest answer to this question was: dialogue. We have to understand and practice the mission as dialogue. We understand that the word dialogue had already been strongly related with interreligious engagements. While acknowledging the importance of interreligious dialogue, we cannot limit ourselves to this area. We need to take into account our missionary commitments with and for the poor and marginalized in their struggles against the unjust political, economic and cultural systems. Therefore, during the chapter itself the idea was proposed to qualify the dialogue as prophetic, a powerful word that has also become very inspiring for many people in the Church over the years.⁶

Two important keywords about the mission of the Church had been combined: dialogue and prophecy. This combination offers new insights and meanings of dialogue. Dialogue needs to have prophetic action as its intention and prophetic action should be borne out of dialogue. "Dialogue is an attitude of 'solidarity, respect, and love' (Gaudium et Spes [GS] 3) that is to permeate all of our activities. Limited as we are by our personal and cultural viewpoints, none of us has attained the whole truth contained in God and revealed fully in Christ. In dialogue we search together for this truth." (15th General Chapter #53). Our being missionary is expressed in our prophetic dialogue endeavors which is concretely manifested in our four characteristic dimensions – Mission Animation, Bible Apostolate, JPIC and Communication. These dimensions define our missionary charism. We read: "Our mission in today's world consists of witnessing to the universality of the Reign of God, our commitment to a fourfold prophetic dialogue in

frontier situations, and the characteristic dimensions of our charism" (#47). This Chapter identifies four groups as our principal dialogue partners: people who have no faith communities and faith seekers, the poor and marginalized, people of different cultures, people of different religious traditions and secular ideologies.

The 15th General Chapter did not give a definition of prophetic dialogue. It describes the term by saying: "It is in dialogue that we are able to recognize 'the signs of Christ's presence and the working of the Spirit' (RM 56) in all people, that we are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, and that we witness to God's love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly, especially where that love has been obscured by prejudice, violence, and hate. It is clear that we do not do dialogue from a neutral position, but out of our own faith. Together with our dialogue partners we hope to hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward, and in this way our dialogue can be called prophetic" (#54). The necessity of dialogue is based on the belief that the Spirit of the Lord is at work in all peoples.⁷ The purpose of this dialogue is not only to learn, acknowledge and accept this presence in all people, but also to listen together to the Spirit who constantly calls us to conversion, to announce God's plan for the world, and to denounce what is contrary to the Kingdom of God.⁸ The Chapter reflects the prophetic dialogue as our witness to the Kingdom of God that includes everyone hence, values human diversity.

For us, prophetic dialogue is our way of living and doing mission. It is not just a strategy, but a spirituality. Our confrere Stephen Bevans writes: "Through reflecting, praying, and discussing – even arguing – together, a community engages in real exercise of contextualizing theology, examining a particular situation or locality, connecting the situation with the theological tradition and missiological insights, and then coming to a decision for action. The goal of this dialogue is to discover what kind of prophetic action needs to be taken

⁶ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011; [José Antunes da Silva](#), *Prophetic Dialogue: Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries*, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2021.

⁷ Heribert Bettscheider, 15. Generalkapitel der Gesellschaft des Gottlichen Wortes, In *Verbum SVD*, 41:3 (2000, pp. 515-517).

⁸ Roger Schroeder, Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue, in *Verbum SVD* 54:1 (2013), pp. 2-21.

in the light of what God is already doing or is calling to be done.”⁹ This understanding of mission as prophetic dialogue, combined with the suggestions of the four preferential dialogue partners, and the statement about the four characteristic dimensions, was helpful to give a certain identity to many apostolates we have in the congregation. Though still far from being successful, we are motivated to exert more efforts to promote these common characteristics to our mission. In a congregation who is committed to a variety of ministries, it is an important task of the leadership team, promote the new paradigm of mission and its features that should mark each of our commitments.

Our 16th General Chapter in 2006 dealt with the question of *ad intra* aspects of prophetic dialogue. The chapter identifies five principal elements:

spirituality,
community,
leadership, and
finances and
formation. It
dedicated a big
portion of its final
document for the
reflection on
leadership, sub
divided on the
themes of lights
and shadows, calls
for conversion,
and steps to

renewal. In the call for conversion, it mentions three points: Call to Prophetic Leadership: This is a leadership that is rooted in truth, love and caring. It animates and facilitates dialogue. Call to Creative Faithfulness to our Charism: a call to move beyond routine and the maintenance of the *status quo*. It should help us find new ways of missionary service, considering the new paradigm of mission and the challenges of the contemporary world. The third is the Call to Participative Leadership: rather than always finding fault with others, every member should heed the call to participate in the leadership and build community. This call to conversion is

followed by four steps for renewal: Improving Communication, Training Leaders, Forming New Leaders, Collaborating among Ourselves and with Others (#51-65).

Understanding mission as prophetic dialogue and promoting leadership that fosters this understanding, is closely related to the idea of co-responsibility of all members. In all the versions of our Constitutions after the Vatican II, this idea is mentioned. In the years after Vatican II, Bernhard Häring (1912-1998) was proposing a paradigm shift of involvement that is from an “*Ethics of Obedience*” to an “*Ethics of Responsibility*.” Applying an *Ethics of Responsibility* would slightly change the perspective and evoke some basic questions regarding the involvement of our members in the provinces and the Society as a whole. How

much
responsibility
does a member
have? Can he
contribute more?
Can the
Congregation do
more? In some
cases, members
can do more;
others have taken
on too much.
Others tend to fall
into mediocracy,
doing just the
minimal. Those in



leadership have a special responsibility for these members. It is also a phenomenon of the lack of openness to assume leadership roles on the part of some members who ask to have their names withdrawn from the list of potential candidates.¹⁰ The leaders should take it as their responsibility to convince others of the importance of this service for the whole congregation.

To emphasize this practical idea of co-responsibility of the members, our last General Chapter in 2018 speaks of *Servant Leadership and Responsible Membership*. It says: “Our SVD Constitutions and Handbook for Superiors,

⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Theological Evolution in Mission. A Theology of Mission*, in Peter Baekelmans and Marie-Hélène Robert (eds.), *New Trends in Mission: emerging future*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2022, p. 52 (41-53).

¹⁰ Heinz Kulüke and Leadership Team, “We view leadership as «a commitment to serve»”, Word from the Leadership Team, in Arnoldus Nota, June 2014, pp. 1-2.

among other materials, have offered us guidelines on the relations between *servant leaders* and *responsible members*... Inspired by these documents and being rooted in the Word, we become more supportive, sympathetic and understanding of those in leadership positions. ... Responsible membership is to have a positive and healthy appreciation of the work of our confreres in leadership positions. Those in leadership positions embrace and accept the will of God manifested through our religious community. They do so in loving obedience to the One who loves us first” (36).

Leadership in the spirit of prophetic dialogue requires the ability of attentive listening, and honest speaking. Oftentimes, the challenge is not the lack of dialogue, but the courage to take prophetic decision and action, which at times unpopular. But this is our responsibility. We are not called to be popular, but to serve the life and mission of the congregation. In exercising leadership as prophetic dialogue, we need the wisdom to keep these aspects in a creative harmony.

Prophetic dialogue also implies collaboration with others. In the last decades our collaboration with the two female congregations – SSpS and SSpSAP – founded by Saint Arnold Janssen and the founding generation has been improving. Especially at the Society level, the leadership team of our congregation has been enriched a lot by the collaboration and joined programs with the Congregational Leadership team of SSpS Sisters. Besides, we together with 10 other congregations promote JPIC through VIVAT International. Furthermore, we are sending our confreres to work with the Jesuits Refugee Services and are part of the inter-congregational initiative Solidarity with South Sudan. Joint initiatives of the congregation like these are an important shift in the leadership of religious congregations.

3. Shift from strict centralism to decentralism

Our congregation is quite centralized, especially regarding finances and personnel. For example, the first assignments of our confreres to a province or region after their final vows, and transfers of members between the provinces/regions/missions, in most cases, are within the competence of the general

administration. Likewise, the provinces are requested to send their annual financial statement and budget to the General Council, which has the right to intervene in the financial matters of the provinces. Certain policies such as home leave, are given to the competence of the province, but still subject to the approval of the General Council. In the past, there used to be more, such as the appointments of the rector and formators of the formation houses and confreres working in the universities, were reserved for the General administration. The General Chapter in 1994 made important decisions towards decentralization hence, it is known to be the decentralization chapter.

The main governance/leadership related decision in this chapter is the official creation of the zonal structure. This is the formalization of the collaboration between the provinces that started already years before. With the chapter decision the whole Society was divided into four zones: Africa-Madagascar, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Pan-America. The zones are not meant to be administrative entities; therefore, there is no additional level of administration. The idea is to promote a model of leadership that concentrates on animation and coordination.¹¹

In the beginning the zonal structure was accepted with enthusiasm. It is seen as a venue for more collaborations between the provinces in the same continents, who share more or less the same concerns and similar resources. Such structure has been part of our Congregation in the last 30 years, along with its ups and downs. At present, the four zones have already developed their own structures and mechanisms, and continuously in dialogue to discover together new ways of doing mission and share good practices that can be adapted by other provinces. This is made possible through the regular meeting at least once every three years. The zonal coordinators are part of what we call Caucus, a bi-annual meeting of the General Council and Generalate officials for evaluation and planning. In every program at the congregational level the importance is given to

¹¹ Andrzej Miotk, op.cit., pp. 155-156. There are critical views to the creation of the zonal structures. Dennis Newton, Zonal Government? Let's Proceed Cautiously Over the past two decades, in *Verbum SVD*, 4/35 (1994), pp. 359-364.

the zonal structure. The General Administration also has been making efforts to make it more effective. While there has been a better flow of communication between the General Administration and the zones, it remains a big challenge to foster communication between the zonal coordinator with the provinces/regions/missions within the same zone.

One of the many remarkable fruits of this zonal structure is found in the AFRAM zone, where we have common formation houses for theology and lately, for novitiates and brother formation. This common project binds the provinces together. In other zones, more fruits are to be seen in the subzones. The subzones are the unions of few provinces/region/mission either in the same countries or in direct neighborhood.

After almost 30 years, we are now in the process of evaluating this structure. The idea of having this structure for animation and coordination without administrative power is good, but a lot is still to be done for its realization. For us, animation and coordination are closely related to the administration. We have seen that in the past years that it has been a good venue for the provincials, the formation team, and the coordinators of the characteristic dimensions to share among themselves and to inspire each other in their ministry. However, the question is: is it enough, or do we need to have this structure as an administrative entity having competence to take certain binding decisions?

Promoting the idea of decentralization goes hand in hand with the capacity to form leaders within the provinces/regions/missions. Since 2002 we have already the practice of organizing a two-week workshop for the new provincials. Besides being the venue to introduce the new leaders to the different policies of the Society, it also serves an important occasion to keep the unity between the provincials/superiors and the generalate administration. In the same manner, the zonal assemblies also offer an opportunity to foster communication between the provincials and the Generalate. The challenge on the part of the provincials is how to overcome a kind of provincialism in which the concerns, resources, good practices, interests, difficulties, and challenges are just kept within the parameters of a province. On the part of the General

administration, it is a challenge how to respect and give due autonomy to provincial leaderships by not intervening too often but instead only if necessary - always having in mind the spirit of dialogue, encouragement, and motivation rather than an attitude of mistrust. Trust between different levels of administration is crucial in the governance of a religious missionary congregation. Our Founder, Saint Arnold Janssen already reminded us that true love and real trust form the basis of all good teamwork.¹² Centralization on personnel and finances brings the advance of a fair distribution of members of the congregations to the provinces and to ensure the financial solidarity in the Society. In the course of the time, we have been making some revision to the policy on personnel and finances. It remains a question: what more can and should we delegate to the provinces while ensuring the solidarity of personnel and finances in the Society.

4. Shift to developing policies and promoting related culture for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults

Another shift that is shaping significantly the governance and leadership of our congregation is related to the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. In the past, the main concern was the good name of the Society and the protection of the vocation of the confreres; this has led to the practice of resolving the cases of abuses of minors and of women, by transferring confreres from one to another place within the province, or to other province. Now, with the raising awareness of the wider society about the responsibility to protect minors and vulnerable adults, and the increasing care within the Church to these groups of people, our Congregation cannot remain indifferent. In 2010 we released our Society's Procedure on Paternal Charges to guide us in dealing with paternity cases of members.¹³ The focus is given to the right of the child to have a father and the right of the woman for a partner in raising the child. The involved confrere is advised to leave the

¹² Arnold Janssen to Anzer/China, Wien, 13. Mai 1888, in Josef Alt (ed), Arnold Janssen SVD. Briefe Nach China, Analecta SVD 82/I: 1879-1897, Rome: SVD, 2000, pp. 19-200.

¹³ Handbook for Superiors, F17, SOCIETY PROCEDURE ON CHARGES OF PATERNITY.

congregation for this purpose. However, if he decides to remain a member of the congregation, stricter procedures are to be followed.

Later on, different policies on dealing with the cases of minors and vulnerable adults were developed. Policies that resolve such cases are not enough. Thus, our Congregation gave as important focus the preventive aspect of such cases. We have stressed the importance of building awareness among the young members in formation. This is part of the integration program for young missionaries assigned to a new country. All the provinces/regions/missions have already made their own local policies giving consideration to the common policy of the congregation, the national context, and the official regulation of the country.¹⁴

Having written policies is one thing. Another thing is implementing them. With the rich cultural differences within our Congregation, and the misconception about preserving the good name of the whole Church and the Society, it remains a challenge within the leadership team on how the due process of responding to such cases is effectively carried out. Sometimes we have to make a series of serious efforts to convince the provincials to take the proper actions for the sake of the victim, without obviously forgetting the care of the involved members. Yes, without forgetting the care of the confrere involved. Our constitutions ask of us to “give special attention to the troubled, the suffering and the aged” (c. 305.2). The exhortation of our Founder remains for me a challenging ideal: “If you have to admonish, then do so with love and a cheerful face and do not forget to sweeten the bitter pill. In addition, perform services and show charity to them whenever you can: love them and serve them ...”¹⁵. For all in the leadership at all levels, we need to go through this difficult dilemma between justice and compassion. The closer we are to the victim or the perpetrator, the more difficult we go through in this dilemma.

Having members from different cultural backgrounds living and working in other countries, there is an increasing need for the leaders to ensure that the newcomers be introduced to different policies of the respective countries, especially regarding the professional standard. Besides organizing the introduction program for new missionaries when they arrive in a country, it is important to have regular ongoing formation and professional accompaniment for them at least in the first five years of their presence in a country.

In the recent documents we summarize the tasks of leadership in three keywords: administration, coordination and animation. Our 16th General Chapter in 2006 writes: “Effective leaders in our Society play three important roles: *animation*, *coordination* and *administration*. As *animators*, they inspire us with their vision, visit our communities regularly, and invite and challenge us to grow in our vocation. As *coordinators*, they help us plan and organize our missionary service by delegating some roles to confreres, according to their gifts and to the particular needs of our community in the context of the local church. As *administrators*, they act as “faithful and prudent servants” the Master has set over the household to serve the community and take care of our properties» (#52). In dealing with cases of abuses, and in making efforts to prevent them from happening, I deeply realized the importance of these three tasks. Clear guidelines are important to have a common reference. Coordination of the involved parties is crucial. The opinion of the Procurator General and the information from the provincial about the case and the decisions taken and the consequent follow up of the decisions are necessary. But as I mentioned above, here lies the challenge, because oftentimes, not because of bad will, but because of ignorance and special situation of the context, be it cultural or ecclesial, it sometimes costs a lot of headaches and demands lot of patience in bringing a case to an end. The shift to put the care of the victims at the center than the good name of the confrere, the Society and the Church, is a long process. Only with continuous work on animation we will be able to create that culture of protection that is so necessary.

¹⁴ In addition to the policies on the policy on protection of minors, we are working on the policy on financial abuse.

¹⁵ Arnold Janssen to Fr. Tollinger in Argentina, April 16, 1901, in Joseph Alt, Arnold Janssen Reader. Guidance in Challenging Times, Analecta 97, Rome: SVD, 2017, p. 57.

5. Shift towards interculturality

For us, interculturality is our heritage, commitment, and mission. It is a “a particular gift of God to us” (17th General Chapter #3). At present almost 6000 members are hailing from 78 countries. Internationality and interculturality are important features of our communities. Whenever the political regulations allow, we are living and working in intercultural communities.

Interculturality is also reflected in our leadership teams at different levels. In the first decades of our history, it is obvious that the members of the General Council were all Europeans. The first non-European was appointed member of the council in 1947 in the person of Francis Humel from USA. In 1972 the first Asian was elected council member, Raphael Cheenath from India. The council became more international when Gaspard Mudiso from D.R. Congo was elected to the council. The first Superior General from outside Europe was Fr. John Musinsky, elected in 1967. He was a descendant of Slovak migrants. The 15th General Chapter did not only present to the congregation a new understanding of mission, but also elected the first Asian Superior General, Fr. Antonio Pernia from the Philippines. At present our council is composed of seven members, from seven different countries, from four continents.

At the level of the provinces the leaders are also international confreres. In this year our new provincials are starting their office. In the AFRAM Zone, there are 8 Africans, 2 Asians, 2 Europeans. The ASPAC Zone that has 20 provinces, the leaders are from India, Indonesia, Philippines, Poland, Fiji. We have 11 provinces in Europe - 7 provincials are from Europe, 3 from Asia, and one from Africa. Yes, for the first time in history we have a non-European confrere as provincial in Germany, and he is from Ghana. Our new rector at the Collegio in Rome is a Togolese. The origins of the provincials in PANAM are as follows: 6 from the PANAM, 7 from ASPAC, 2 from EUROPA and one from AFRAM.

The faces of our leaders reflect the composition of members of the Society. Today, 65,2% of the members are from ASPAC, 16.7% from EUROPA, 10.7% from AFRAM and 7.4% from

PANAM. Though 2/3 of the members are from Asia, we are and continue to be an international congregation, not an Asian congregation. A challenge for such an international/intercultural congregation is how to animate members that cultural identity is not the main determining factor in electing the leaders. In some provinces this has been a big problem; it created a sort of division among members, and as a result the newly elected leaders have to spend a lot of time and energy in bringing back unity. The chapter in 2012 asks every province to design a “process for elections characterized by prayerful discernment for the choice of candidates that transcends ethnic or national loyalties and affinities” (17th General Chapter #35).

Oftentimes the cultural difference also falls together with the generational difference. Elderly members from the North are sharing life and mission with the younger members from the South. Generally, such are the crucial points a leader in an intercultural/intergenerational community or province is facing: power/authority, money, relationship and solidarity with the families of the members, hospitality, trust and cultural identity.¹⁶

Exercising leadership in an intercultural/international congregation has made clear for me the ideal, and at the same time I became aware of how far I and many of my confreres are from such an ideal. Thus, it is important for us to reflect on this ideal. Based on the reflections of my predecessors Henry Barlage, Antonio Pernia and Heinz Kulueke, I would like to share the following points as fundamental tasks of leadership in this intercultural context: the leader as (a) promoter of diversity, (b) mediator of conflicts, and (c) guardian of unity.¹⁷

(1) Promoter of diversity

This forms part of the task of the leaders in the international congregations today – the active promotion of cultural diversity at all levels. “And this requires making the province or

¹⁶ Maria Pilar Benavente Serrano, *Servant Leadership: Living Interculturality with a Sense of Purpose and Mission*, in Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing (eds), *Intercultural Living*, Vol 1, Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, 2015, p. 161.

¹⁷ Antonio Pernia, *Leadership in Intercultural Communities*, A Word from Father General, in Arnoldus Nota, June 2011, pp.1-2

community conducive to diversity or attractive to the coming of young confreres from other cultures or countries. Thus, this first task entails the recognition and acceptance of diversity and of differences. This implies ensuring that those of the minority cultures feel they belong to the community or province/region. This requires making them feel that they are welcomed, acknowledged and appreciated, not just tolerated. While this task will need to involve the whole community, the leader will nevertheless have a special role to play. As a promoter of diversity, the leader is called not just to protect diversity where it already exists, but also to foster it where it does not yet exist. Indeed, many provincials/regionals write to the generalate to ask for confreres from other cultures or countries so as to “internationalize” their provinces/regions.”¹⁸

To give space to the diversity it is necessary for the leaders to be aware of different factors that put certain group of the Congregation as the dominant group. They can be the number, the financial power, the historical importance, the ability to speak and present oneself in the public etc.

At the level of the General Administration, we are trying to have the diversity of cultural backgrounds of the members, in the leadership teams of the provinces. And because it is the competence of the General Administration in appointing members to the provinces, we are aware of the importance of avoiding to many members from same nationality in a province. It is not always possible because the largest national groups of around 100 members who receive their first assignment are from four nationalities: Indonesia, India, Vietnam and Ghana.

(2) Mediator of conflicts

This task of mediation of conflicts emerges naturally from allowing diversity and differences. “It is essential for the leader to foster among the members the conviction about two elements of interculturality: *First*, that everyone needs to develop a genuine respect for cultural difference. Respect goes beyond simply the recognition or acknowledgement of cultural difference. Beyond noticing and accepting

cultural diversity, respect for cultural difference means coming to terms with the fact that diversity is not going to go away, but that it is here to stay; that diversity is not just a cause of problems and conflicts, but also a source of enrichment and growth. And *secondly*, that everyone in the community realizes that genuine interculturality will have an impact on community structures, religious lifestyle, ways of worship, methods of work, systems of government. Everyone should expect changes to occur in the community because of our cultural diversity.”¹⁹ This is can only done through ongoing formation of the members.

When there are tensions and conflicts, it is important for the leaders to be clear about their source or their nature – that is, whether they are due to personal differences or to cultural diversity, which is not always easy. “Often personal and cultural differences converge or combine to create tensions and conflicts. Sometimes, too, members intentionally disguise the nature of the conflict by presenting personal conflicts as cultural conflicts and vice-versa. Nevertheless, it is important, as far as possible, to distinguish between personal and cultural conflicts.”²⁰

Mediating conflicts will often demand that the leader act in a way that he is beyond all groups, “supra partes”. And yet, “trying to be objective and neutral does not have to mean that the leader acts as if he were “culture-less” or as if he were not influenced and “colored” by his own particular culture. Here, it is important that the leader acknowledges his own cultural limitation, and from there try to mediate between conflicting individuals or groups in the community. Because of his own cultural limitation, the leader will need to make an effort to understand the other or others. In this way, he needs not only to promote dialogue among the conflicting individuals or groups, but also to be part of the dialogue himself.”²¹ Open discussion with members of the council from the cultural groups who are involved in the conflicts could be of help in finding ways and solutions.

¹⁸ Antonio Pernia, *Leadership in Intercultural Communities*, Arnoldus Nota, June 2011, p. 1

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 2

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

(3) *Guardian of unity*

As said above, unity is the ultimate aim of genuine community living and the witness we give as religious to the Church and the world. The two other tasks mentioned above are ultimately to be directed toward this third task. “Here, of course, unity should not be understood as uniformity or as the dominant culture subsuming the minority cultures in the community. Rather, unity should be understood in terms of “unity in diversity” or, in other words, a unity that is the fruit of the true interaction of the different cultures of the members hence, genuine “interculturality”. This task entails the creation of a climate whereby each culture allows itself to be transformed or enriched by the other. In this way, each individual member, as well as the entire community, is enriched by the interaction of their different cultures.”²² The unity in intercultural communities is not a “static” but a “dynamic” kind of unity; “not some pre-conceived idea of unity to which everyone needs to conform, but a reality that is constantly in the process of being built through the interaction.”²³

It is an important task of the leaders in an intercultural community to foster the mentality among the members that each one is a gift to the other, “despite – or precisely because of – their differences.” “The leaders need to promote the conviction that there is something to receive from everyone, and that everyone has a gift to offer. But this vision of everyone being a gift to the other flourishes only in the context of friendship and love. In the end, then, the third task of the leader as guardian of unity is really the task of fostering love and friendship among the members of the community.”²⁴ To be able to foster unity, special efforts are required from leaders who are from a dominant group.

6. Shift brought about by COVID-19

The last shift I want to discuss is the one brought about by COVID-19. The period of the lock down has brought a lot of changes, triggered new ways of doing things which seemed to be very difficult before. It was a time

that provoked a lot of imaginations about different religious and missionary life would be. Now it seems that not much is left over from this time. And yet, there are some new factors that remain important for the leadership of our congregations.

First, the importance of closeness. In the time of isolation and helplessness it is a real need to find and show closeness to members. The platforms of collaboration such as UISG and USG were very helpful and gained a new energy. A lot of programs were organized by these two unions to help the leaders of the Congregation to have a broader view of the situation. At the same time, different reflections through webinars were instrumental in widening up the horizon and putting ourselves in communication and connection with others. For me, the COVID-19 pandemic has helped increase the importance and the meaning of such platform of collaboration.

Second, keeping the orientation and transmitting happiness. In the period of lockdown, I realized how simple words of solidarity and hope strengthen the bond of unity and give orientation and happiness to the members. I was very inspired by the talk given by Professor Tonino Cantelmi on a zoom-meeting on 2nd December 2020 on leadership in the religious Congregation in the time of and post COVID.²⁵ He defines the leader as “the one who enables the group to achieve the group's purpose and goals with the least amount of anxiety and the greatest amount of happiness. I tie to the theme of the leader the theme of happiness. A leadership of our times cannot be disconnected from reflection on happiness.” Happiness is of course related to the awareness of sense. COVID-19 brings a new the awareness of the importance of the reflection on happiness as an important task of the leadership in religious missionary congregations.

Third, the importance of finding gestures, symbols and words such as the gesture and words of Pope Francis on March 25, 2020. His prayerful submission at St. Peter's Square was a powerful gesture. This event is a clear reminder for the leaders of the importance in finding ways of expressing the thoughts and feelings (fears and hope) of the members. In a time like

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ <https://www.usgroma.org/1/commissione-salute-usg-uisg-essere-superiori-in-tempo-di-pandemia2/>

ours where images are so important. One of the main tasks of leadership is to keep and nurture unity, the identification of the members, the awareness and the feeling that we belong to the same family, we are in the same boat.

Fourth, the sensitivity to deal with vulnerability. Another learning for the leadership from the experience of COVID-19 is how to be sensitive to the vulnerability and how to deal with it. The pandemic reveals how vulnerable we, our systems and traditions are. To inculcate this sensitivity among the male religious is not easy, and yet necessary.

Fifth, the importance and urgency of communal discernment. COVID-19 makes clear how unclear and uncertain the future is. We, who are experts in making plan and we are always asked about our plan for future, suddenly were

just to administer the change; we need to shape the change. Leaders are called to be protagonists of changes, and not just the victims of changes. To respond to changes we need to review and revise guidelines, redesign systems, and create new structures. But leadership is not just about having all these, it is also about leaders who with their personality coordinate, administer, and animate members to live and do the mission God has entrusted to us. Stepping into the role of a leader, we change and grow with the responsibilities we assume. But we should not forget that leaders also shape the role they assume. It is true what is said about Pope Francis, that he attracts so many people, because he is not that kind of leader who is only changed by the role he assumes, but who changes the role he assumes. Leader do not only need to clarify guidelines, but also to give their



confronted with the experience of not knowing the future. This has brought us to be humble and to listen better to others, to animate the communal discernment process. It is a providence, that at the same time we are called by Pope Francis to practice of synodality as the way of being Church. The future of leadership can only a walking listening and learning together.

Conclusion

The times have changed and is changing. And for us Christians, every time is the time of God, *Kairos*. As leaders, we need to see the opportunities given and to respond to them creatively. Peter Zulehner, a former professor of Pastoral Theology of the University of Vienna, once said: We have to overcome the temptation

own flavor. Leaders cannot avoid being persons with certain characteristics, and with this, willing or unwilling, they shape the organization. And the organization should also be ready for this.

Changing Landscape of Religious Life & Mission

It looks like the biggest game changer in consecrated life and the missionary activity of the Church in our century is traceable to our declining numbers. In a 2021 study on the reasons for this decline in the 20th century, researchers from Leuven¹ studied available data between 1970 and 2020. The number of religious worldwide decreased by 33%, although the drop is much higher in Europe by 59% and in the US by as much as 71%. For the De La Salle Brothers, our numbers were still increasing while Vatican II was in session, reaching a peak of 16,824 Brothers in 1965. Fast forward 58 years to 2023, the congregation currently counts 2,972 Brothers registering an 82% decline since 1965. That is certainly a game-changer, if not an earth-shaking disruption!

The researchers noted that while the decline worldwide was noticeable beginning in the 1950s up to the 1960s, it is possible that the decline started even as early as the 1930s and that it is highly unlikely that this could be traced to a single factor. Instead, they opine that it is best to consider that the “historical, societal, ecclesial, and theological factors all play a role and mutually influence one another”. Thus, the critical factors leading to the changing landscape we are experiencing today must be understood “in the context of developments in society and the Church today, but also account for the developments in Catholic theology after Vatican II up to today.”²

In the corporate world, the changing landscape has been captured since 1987 from the lens of what has been popularized as VUCA time or the age of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Societal leaders from business corporations, humanitarian organizations, or political parties have steeled themselves to be

better prepared for the future through renewed calls for resilience, information gathering, restructuring, and continued experimentation or innovation to ensure institutional survival, sustainability, and continued growth. VUCA brought a sobering warning to all that it cannot be ‘business as usual’. Harvard Business Review³ summarizes the key characteristics and possible approaches that could assist leaders in responding proactively and effectively. While planning tools using VUCA situations were used mainly for visioning workshops or scenario planning, the recent experience of the effects of COVID-19 should awaken leadership in religious congregations to look again at some of the key learnings we could pick from those planning strategies.



But our analysis of the facts and choice of appropriate responses and approaches cannot be devoid of the perspective of faith. It seems to me that the challenges to consecrated life are best understood from the lens of a renewed call for *aggiornamento*, which was the resounding appeal of Vatican II. We need to refresh our memory of that *kairos* moment more than six decades ago and then contextualize our response today by actively participating in the ongoing synodal journey of the Church. In our Institute, we discerned that we could do this best by inviting all the members of the Lasallian Family—not just the Brothers of the Christian Schools—to join our pilgrimage to the peripheries so that, together and by association, we can make the peripheries our home. We envision this conversion journey to transform us

¹ Anton Lingier and Wim Vandewiele, 2021, “The Decline of Religious Life in the Twentieth Century”, retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060388>.

² Ibid.

³ Nate Bennett and G. James Lemoine, 2014, “What VUCA Really Means for You”, retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2014/01/what-vuca-really-means-for-you>.

so we can be more attentive to God's will in at least three ways by listening, together and by association, with the Holy Spirit speaking through:

- (a) **other voices in the Church, apart from the hierarchy and congregational leaders,**
- (b) **the cries from the peripheries and the groans of all of creation for salvation, and**
- (c) **the painful realities we face today in our respective religious families.**

As a first step, we communicated to our confreres that the center of the Institute is not only in Rome but is also found in every community burning with zeal for the mission. In our first year in office, we have decided as a General Council community to spend two weeks each in the five regions of the Institute. Visits to projects in the margins are prioritized. We continue to hold Lasallian Conversations with various sectors of the wider Lasallian Family, spending ample time listening to participants' experiences and reflections instead of inputs from experts or leaders. We intend to convene seven global commissions composed of Lasallian Partners and Brothers tasked to assist the Institute in listening attentively to emerging critical issues and seeking creative ways to respond.

We have realized that the personal, institutional, and congregational conversion we pray for should bring us farther from our comfort zones and closer to God's Reign.

From a Church of the Magisterium to a Church that listens.

From a teaching congregation to a learning community.

From a sage on the stage to a guide on the side.

From an expert with a big ego to a novice with a humble heart.

From an exclusive club of Brothers with a "big B" to becoming little sisters and brothers for "those far from salvation".

We have launched the Institute's *Leavening Project* as our overarching framework inviting all Lasallians—Partners and Brothers,

institutions and communities, teachers and students, women and men, young and old—to begin the journey to the peripheries and away from our comfort zones, collaborating with other protagonists active in the peripheries, and being transformed in the process as we rediscover our sisters and brothers among God's poor and in all of creation. From a position of strength, we are now forced to face our human mortality, institutional vulnerabilities, and real threats to our communities and ministries. Burdened with the task of maintaining existing Lasallian institutions, we also face many obstacles in opening new ministries, given the limitations on human and financial resources. Thus, we embraced the Gospel imagery of the power of yeast in transforming dough as our overall framework for the next seven years. These may be very small initiatives, but they should have a community component where Brothers from different cultures and ages can witness our fraternity. It should also allow lay volunteers to join a mixed Lasallian community or for lay members to form an all-lay Lasallian community.

We recognize that the call of the *Leavening Project* to seek "new pathways" is not necessarily novel, as we are merely building on those earlier efforts of the Institute since Vatican II to be faithful to our founding story. Among these milestones were efforts to:

Open spaces for dialogue. On the District and global level, many sessions were held to review community and institutional vision-mission statements as well as policies and programs with the participation of multiple stakeholders. Concerns about safeguarding and integrity arising from concrete cases were a wake-up call to institutionalize policies for protecting children and vulnerable adults and financial standards. Other discussions revolved around the need to be more inclusive and less selective in our schools while surfacing the very real issues of the viability of school operations given the increasing cost of education when the majority of teachers and staff are salaried personnel.

Create avenues for voices from the peripheries to be heard and amplified. Several of these sessions included the active

participation of Lasallian women, students and youth, and the non-formal education sector. Invited to these sessions were representatives from marginalized groups such as farmers, fisherfolk, refugees, street children, indigenous communities, etc.

Experiment with more inclusive governance structures. Districts created Mission Councils composed of Lasallian Partners and independent experts from other fields. The District of France, for example, created the *Tutel* model, which is their school network recognized as a legal entity in the country but connected with the Institute officially under the rules of Canon Law. On the global level, we started inviting lay associates years back to our General Chapters with voice but without vote. We have also convened three international Lasallian assemblies of lay associates with voice and vote to discuss and decide on the global Lasallian Mission. In our current structure, we have a Mission Council where lay associates' responsibilities are similar to those of the General Councilors. Recently, half of the FSCs in the International Economic Council were replaced by lay associates who are finance experts.

Collaborate with other religious congregations or non-government organizations. Recognizing that the Lasallian charism and educational mission are not meant to build up the Institute but are in service of God's Reign, we have started to work with other congregations, dioceses, and NGOs to initiate new ministries or projects, including participation in the inter-congregational project, Solidarity for South Sudan. We have two joint communities with the Marist Brothers, one in the Amazon and the other in Lebanon. We have

joint formation programs with several other Brothers' congregations through *Tutti Fratelli*.

The journey has just begun, although we are discovering many seeds have already been planted in the past decades without us being aware of them. Some are already starting to sprout and grow. One such important realization is that since the 1950s, when the number of Brothers reached its peak, the number of students entrusted to us in our schools has been steadily on the rise. Serving less than half a million students worldwide in the 1950s, enrollment rose to more than 700 thousand in the 1960s and kept increasing even while the number of Brothers started a steep decline. We continue to register a yearly increase in student population despite COVID-19 and the



continued drop in Brothers worldwide. Evidently, this is made possible through the faith and zeal of more than a hundred thousand Lasallian associates worldwide. We only started tracking their impact on the Institute beginning in 1994. Before that time, like women and children in ancient Jewish times, they were not counted. The numbers do not tell the full story, but we now have a better sense of where the Holy Spirit is leading us if we are serious about participating in the grand plan of God's Reign.

Joys and Challenges of Changing Landscape

PANEL SHARING of our experiences from the point of view of leadership of a congregation - the joys and the challenges we face particularly relating to the changing landscape (demography etc.) of our congregation.

My Congregation is called “The Tertiary sisters of St. Francis (TSSF)”. We were founded in North Tyrol, Italy in 1700, by Venerable Maria



Hueber, for the purpose of educating young girls from poor families.

Our Congregation is international and is composed of

4 Provinces. We have a membership of over 400, 3/4 of who are in the African Province. We minister in 8 countries (Italy, Hall in Austria, Bolivia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa Republic and Morocco) Like most congregations ours is experiencing a change in its demography.

I am the first non-European Superior General and this has both joys and challenges.

JOYS

In my congregation, there are some joys in the changing demography. I live in an intercultural community in which we come from 3 continents. It is a gift and a beautiful experience. The gift is the beauty of sharing our cultural giftedness and being in touch with the issues that arise in the different parts of the congregation.

The energy and vitality of a large youthful population is a sign of hope of continuity. The elders are our pride. They do not only encourage and support us with their prayers but also connect us to our roots. They inspire us with their faith and their perseverance.

In our Generalate community, we come from 3 continents. The joy of an intercultural/ cross-

cultural experience cannot be underestimated. It is a gift and a beautiful experience. The beauty of sharing the richness of our different cultures and learning from one another's culture is wonderful. It helps us to be in touch and connect with the issues that arise in the different parts of the congregation and to understand the

context in our discernment processes. We integrate our various cultures when we are celebrating a sister's name day or birthday. This is also a witness to our society that it is possible for people from different cultures to live together happily, respectfully and peacefully.

We cannot underestimate the contribution of technology to the development of our world today and in a special way during the Covid 19 lockdown period. During this time, we developed other ways of connecting with one another and with our members. I participated in many educative and empowering webinars organized by UISG and other organizations. Also, since we could not travel to meet our sisters in presence we connected with provincial leadership teams, groups and individuals through online meetings. We even carried out canonical visitation in one of our Provinces online. It was better than postponing the visitation to another time that we were not sure when it would be possible.

CHALLENGES

While there is growth in membership in the African Province, there is a sharp decline in membership in the Provinces of Europe and Bolivia. The challenge is an increasing number of sisters who need health care and long-term care. This ageing challenge extends to the harsh reality of frequent deaths of members where you sometimes face the demise of more than one around the same time or at very close intervals. Additionally, the decrease of members through ageing and deaths leads to lack of personnel in some institutions etc., resulting to either the closure of some of them or the

drawing of contracts with organizations to run them.

The African Province which has many vocations and consequently many young and vibrant sisters is at the same time having a high number of sisters aging and in need of health care which are sometimes long term.

The Changing demographics has brought forth the need to restructure the large Province of Africa for effective mission and to see how to help the diminishing Provinces to merge so they can have the personnel for leadership in the Province. It is not easy to do this especially when people are afraid of the unknown and prefer to maintain the status quo.

A notable challenge of intercultural community like mine is language since there is none of the languages that we come from which everyone speaks. To reduce the conflicts that were arising we decided to adopt Italian as our community language.

The challenge for young religious who come to live in an intercultural community for the first time is the expectation that they find themselves in the new culture immediately. Some of them become overwhelmed and get discouraged when the expectation is too high. Some start to see this as a kind of assimilating. If we want our young ones to commit themselves to Religious life, there must be a change in this direction. This calls for exchange and mutuality and to integrate them gradually into our community culture. The Pope is calling us to integrate migrants, and this includes members of our communities.

We are seven (7) in number in our Generalate community. Many of us come from one culture, there could easily be a dominance over the others. This could gradually create tensions and lead to a toxic work environment. In our case we realized this early enough and sought ways of doing what Madsen J., Mabokela R. refers to as, "Creating positive workplace relationships and preventing intergroup differences." We did this by integrating all the official languages of our Provinces into our liturgy and bringing aspects of our different cultures in community celebrations. We also sought ways to integrate our cultural foods/cuisines in our meals.

Although technology has brought much development in our world, technology and globalization today also make leadership more

challenging. The mindset of the people we lead, especially the young is different from those past generation, this imposes greater demands on leadership. The current landscape therefore calls for more attentiveness and sensitivity from the leader. Thus, instead of multiplying rules, and facilitating exit of members, we need to seek ways to be more supportive, leverage on programs that can help members cope with today's challenges of Religious life. This may include ongoing formative programmes to help members cope with the current reality.

Today both the church and the secular community promote Safeguarding, respect for human rights and dignity. Contrary to the past when the practice of the vows especially the vow of obedience was that people were made to obey leadership without asking to understand. Today, the reality is different, members deserve to be involved in decisions made about them and their ministries. This constitutes respect for the dignity of the human person. When this is not done, there is resistance resulting to leaders feeling not supported, antagonized, and attacked. By members. It is important that leaders adopt positive and humane ways to relate with members in these matters.

Safeguarding today is not only limited to children and vulnerable adults. It has broadened to include creating enabling, healthy and lifegiving environment that promotes human flourishing. Thus, leaders have the responsibility to create, foster and facilitate a landscape where children and all who encounter us, our employers and our members feel safe and esteemed. Safeguarding means creating safe environment in the community where we live as well as our workplaces.

I would like to conclude by saying that leadership today calls for self-formation to help the leader to be in touch with her humanness, see her role as that of accompanying her sisters to embrace their vocation with joy and enthusiasm. Leaders today need to inculcate the attitude of listening, of presence and of building positive energy within and around them. These are qualities I have personally found enabling in this role and my sisters have constantly affirmed it as facilitating their trust in me and supporting me in my role.

Gouvernance-Animation-Finance



« Une brève
présentation
personnelle »

Je suis de la Société
des Missions
Africaines (SMA).
Cette année je rends
grâce à Dieu pour
mes 25 ans de

sacerdoce (4 juillet). J'ai travaillé presque 14
ans en RCA avec les pygmées et aussi comme
Econome du diocèse de Berbérati. Depuis mai
2011 je suis au service du General à Rome
comme Econome General.

**Je suis originaire du Togo : Lawson Didier
Têvi.**

Gouvernance, Animation et Finances

Gouvernance, Animation et Finances sont 3
expressions ou thèmes qui constituent le refrain
d'une même chanson de cohésion, d'unité pour
une bonne collaboration dans notre vie
missionnaire actuelle en dépit de nos différents
charismes et visions.

J'aurai juste à vous présenter deux éléments
importants qui sont nés de la réalité de vie
missionnaire ou religieuse que nous vivons
aujourd'hui. Ces deux éléments sont : *le
changement et la nouveauté.*

1. Dans le contexte du paysage changeant de la vie missionnaire religieuse.

Ce qui change c'est en premier lieu le visage
de nos congrégations et de nos sociétés
missionnaires c'est l'origine des membres
actifs : *au départ c'était l'occident mais
aujourd'hui c'est l'Afrique, c'est l'Asie et pour
d'autres c'est l'Amérique Latine. Tout dépend
de la position géographique d'action ou de
présence de chaque Congrégation ou Société.
Un petit tableau récapitulatif sur notre Société
montre le vrai visage statistique de cette
réalité:*

	2012	2021
OCCIDENT	580 membres	327 membres
AFRIQUE- ASIE	+200 membres	401

*Nb- juste pour dire que sur +-10 ans la
population de l'occident a diminué de la moitié
alors que celle de l'Afrique et l'Asie a doublé !*

- **Gouverner** au sein de nos structures, qu'est-ce
que cela implique dans notre vie en Société des
Missions Africaines, avec une majorité de
confrères d'origine africaine, des confrères
asiatiques et des anciens des vieilles entités
(**Occident-Amérique**).

- **Animer**, c'est-à-dire accompagner une réflexion
commune et prendre ensemble des
décisions à mettre en œuvre grâce à l'instrument
que sont nos structures (ce sont des textes issus
de nos Lois et Constitutions constamment
actualisés en A.G : Assemblée Générale ou en
C.P : Conseil Plénier. *Ce serait de façon imagée
nos GPS*).

- **Financer** : quel coût, pour le recrutement, la
formation de base (inclut la propédeutique), la
formation continue (ICOF-ICMA...), la
formation à l'encadrement par des spécialités
(études supérieures de tout genre). Les
responsabilités au niveau de la formation
internationale en collaboration avec d'autres
Instituts. (AG : p :43-45)

2. Ce qui est nouveau :

*Pour beaucoup c'est que les lieux
d'implantations nous sont maintenant confiés
par les Églises locales (à l'époque ce sont nos
Instituts qui proposaient la répartition du
personnel et du territoire.). Ainsi, nous sommes
aussi amenés à ouvrir des Missions en Europe.
En fait les Églises locales nous confient
maintenant des territoires paroissiaux tant en
Afrique en Europe et qu'en Amérique.*

- **Gouverner** veut dire que tout en vivant notre charisme, nous assurons notre insertion en favorisant celle de nos membres nommés dans les paroisses ou les œuvres diocésaines. Nous faisons en sorte que chacune de nos communautés respecte au maximum les directives pastorales du clergé local et de son évêque (référence à nos constitutions...). Notre devoir est aussi d'être capable d'apporter la note originale de notre charisme propre pour l'enrichissement de l'annonce. (AG :p 49-57)

- **Animer** signifie que les supérieurs de chacune de nos entités veille à la qualité du clergé qu'il prête à un diocèse. Cela se manifeste par la capacité de participer à la réflexion, voire de la susciter, au sein de l'Église locale, pour une dynamique qui soit une ouverture au monde d'Aujourd'hui afin de lui donner la Paix et la Joie de grandir dans l'Amour révélé par le Christ Jésus.

- **Financer** : le maître mot pour l'avenir est l'auto-suffisance de chaque entité : (AG : p 63-64). Nous ne devons pas oublier que la capacité de mettre tout en commun est la règle évangélique

Les textes de la deuxième semaine de Pâques nous ont permis de méditer sur l'esprit du partage et de solidarité auquel les premières communautés vivaient. (Acte Apo. 4,32... « *La multitude de ceux qui avaient cru n'était qu'un cœur et qu'une âme. Nul ne disait que ses biens lui appartenissent en propre, mais tout était commun entre eux... Joseph, surnommé par les apôtres Barnabas, ce qui signifie fils d'exhortation, Lévite, originaire de Chypre, vendit un champ qu'il possédait, apporta l'argent, et le déposa aux pieds des Apôtres...* » ; Mais il y a aussi l'autre partie qui ne répond pas à cette aspiration du partage : Act 5, suivant « Mais un homme nommé Ananias, avec Saphira sa femme, vendit une propriété, et retint une partie du prix, sa femme le sachant ; puis il apporta le reste, et le déposa aux pieds des apôtres. Pierre lui dit : Ananias, pourquoi Satan a-t-il rempli ton cœur, au point que tu mentes au Saint Esprit, et que tu aies retenu une partie du prix du champ ? S'il n'eût pas été vendu, ne te restait-il pas ? Et, après qu'il a été vendu, le prix n'était-il pas à ta disposition ? Comment as-tu pu mettre en ton cœur un pareil dessein ? Ce

n'est pas à des hommes que tu as menti, mais à Dieu. Ananias, entendant ces paroles, tomba, et expira...»

Nous sommes tous guettés par cette réaction d'Ananias...aujourd'hui avec la recherche du gain facile et avec l'accès rapide à la modernisation, si nous ne laissons pas guidés par l'esprit du partage fraternel, nous tomberons dans le même piège, et cela ne peut se réaliser que si la comptabilité générale à la certitude que toutes les comptabilités soient claires et transparentes (Directoire Financier actualisé-Charte pour une bonne gestion promulguée...).

Remarque :

Ce sont des décisions qui peuvent nous amener à de lourds investissements financiers pour accompagner ces communautés, humaines, religieuses qui vivent au sein de sociétés matérialistes. En effet il faut pour eux et avec eux réinventer un tissu social hétérogène en formant des guides qui aient le double souci de l'Universel et de l'Appel.

Il en va de l'avenir de la foi chrétienne en Occident car le matérialisme gagne très vite du terrain dans le cœur de tout homme si l'on n'y prend garde ! Nul ne peut servir deux Maîtres.

3. Je ne fais que signaler la réalité d'un renouvellement complet des moyens de communications. On devrait relire le décret de Vatican II sur le sujet pour, tout en étant à la pointe du progrès, avoir la sagesse de ne pas courir après des lubies à la manière du monde. Que de consacrés sont « accro » au point que non seulement les finances en pâtissent mais aussi la vie de la liturgie en communauté.

Rome le 23 avril 2023

Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life

From Women's Perspective



Introduction

I am sure speakers before me have spoken on the changing demographic scenario. To treat this vast topic within

manageable limits I will make my presentation with two focal points.

1. What the changing landscape is inviting the global south to- the implications.
2. What might be some of the pointers or future directions in the changing landscape anywhere.

In the first part, I will try to share from an Asian and women's perspective more precisely from an Indian perspective, and in the second part from a general perspective.

World population has reached 8 billion in December 2022.

60% of the world population live in Asia.

40% of the world population live in just two countries: China (24%) and India (16%). This too is changing very soon.

90% of the world population live in the North of the Equator, and 10% in the South of the Equator.

One of the most interesting countries is India where there are more religious sisters than in any other country (16% of all the religious sisters in the world). According to CARA (Centre for applied research in the apostolate the number of sisters in 1975 in India was 41,868 and this had grown to 99,282 in 2019. The number of sisters grew during this period by 137% as the number of Catholics increased by 145%.

We are all hearing these days about the Global South becoming the new locus of missionaries

and missionary activities. Given that this is a reality, how much is the South prepared to meet the demands of this changing landscape and to accommodate the shift that is taking place? What changes do we need to make in the South to adequately honour this responsibility?

I will mention a few.

- **More synodality** is needed. Recently I was home for two weeks in Kerala. My youngest brother is actively involved in the parish and in the management of the temporal goods of the parish. I asked him if there was anything happening in the parish about the synodal journey. He said, *nothing. Never heard about it. When did it start? Were we expected to do something?* The synodal call is by and large limited to the clergy and religious. Some work has been done at the level of conferences of religious and at diocesan levels. But at parish and down- to earth laity level synodality is still a distant reality. The constituent elements of synodality are communion, participation and mission. There has to be more listening, inclusion and discernment in the way mission is carried out.

- **More dialogue is needed:** closely connected to and forming part of synodality is the need for more dialogue. Spirituality and religiosity have deep roots in Asia. We are familiar with prayer, meditation, contemplation, sacrifices, fast and such spiritually inclined practices; but that does not necessarily translate into promotion of human rights, respect for the rights and dignity of the human persons, freedom and equality. As a society, the global south has a long way to go in terms of promoting true democracy and human rights. What is seen in the socio-political realm often spills over to religious communities and style of leadership. This takes us to the third aspect.

- **Understanding authority and leadership:** it needs to undergo change both from the part of the leader as well as from the part of the “subject” or the “obeyed”. By and large, it is still a very hierarchical, top- down approach. The landscape is changing but with some difficulties. While a great majority submit themselves to authority without any questioning, every now and then you will find a few persons rising up against the authorities in a dramatic and ground shaking way. This may cause considerable damage to the credibility and witness value of the church and religious life. In a country like India, the media are waiting like ravenous wolves to devour anything sensational particularly about religious sisters and priests. And they are having a feast. Often, we cry about the tarnished image, but over and above the scandal, what is the situation saying? What is it pointing to? Where is it shedding light? What are the deeper issues here?
- **Gender relations need to improve:** here too changes are taking place. But sometime at a high price. It is almost like saying that for a reformation to take place, something has to first go public, shameful and explosive. I take the example of the Kerala Church: Until recently it was secure and proud of its history and legacy. Suddenly it is brought low and is now facing a tumultuous period in its history ever. Tussles between bishops and priests, between groups of priests, between the clergy and the laity, between priests and the police are happening in front of the media camera openly. One reason I conclude for the present-day trouble is because it did not include sufficient number of women in the discernment processes and in the decision-making bodies of the church. Changing landscape demands that we change with the times.

The **second focal point** of my sharing is about the **Future Directions** that the changing landscape may demand of us - never mind where – whether in the South or in the West or in any other part of the world. What might be some of the components of a changing landscape? Changing landscape in religious

missionary life, I believe, is not primarily a geographical phenomenon. It is first and foremost an interior call, an invitation to attitudinal and spiritual conversion.

1. Shed Obsession with Numbers: we hear this frequent lamentation that the numbers are getting smaller. Large numbers joining religious life is not the norm, not even a good idea. RL only needs that number that are called to it. Religious life must occupy a liminal space in society in terms of numbers, in terms of its style of functioning and structures. Religious life is not the majority choice, it will always be a minority choice and that is a good thing. People who opt for religious life should be minority. If large numbers of people are joining religious life, it should not be seen as a positive sign. It is a call to be leaven, little flock and salt-minority but effective and creative minority. Change and transformation always come from a minority, not from a mass. While it is not the mainstream trend, those who are in it must be effective enough to make a positive contribution. The catalytic value consists in the conscious decision to remain liminal for the sake of making a difference.

Now, even as we need not worry about numbers, we must keep our eyes opened to the inevitable future that we will face. The changes that happened in the west over vocations will surely come to the south pretty soon. In India we think we will go on like this for centuries. The speed with which we expand, purchase property, build, start big and complex institutions somehow tells me that we are closing our eyes to a reality that is staring at us. The reality will strike us very soon and very hard. Recently UISG was instrumental in holding a number of meetings by congregations in Europe coming to completion/closing. The process of thinking and planning started a long time ago. They are planning well in advance. But I am wondering if the Religious South has ever given a thought to the inevitability of our having to close down and move on to become simpler, pastoral presence among people.

2. **Interior Strengthening:** Purposeless activism and un-reflected ministry should be shunned. We should be able to draw from the inner sources of God-experience, spirituality, prayer, and contemplation. Superficial acquaintance in matters is not enough. We should be able to answer the meaning questions people ask about God, life, suffering, death etc., As Pope Francis said, we need to be experts in communion. This will be reflected in the way we live our lives and carry out our mission: one of justice, peace, compassion and fellowship.

3. Celebrating the **pilgrim dimension of the Christian vocation:** The synodal document beautifully illustrates the pilgrim journey through the imagery of the tent: the rope, the tent clothes and the pegs signify the transitoriness of life. We are on the way, not established here for once and for all. One of the hallmarks of this pilgrim spirituality is simplicity. Even if the world outside is getting increasingly complex and complicated, it does expect from the religious and hope to see in them, a certain simplicity. Changing landscape, ironically asks religious to live simpler and uncomplicated lives. It is living with optimism, wonder and detachment in the conviction that we are enroute and that we will reach the destination. I mentioned the powerful biblical imager of the tent; there is an element of “tentativeness” in the pilgrim journey. Can I rejoice in small things, work in small teams and celebrate small victories?

4. **Keeping alive the flame of hope:** from a deep-rooted faith that God will fulfil his promises and words, that we can bank on his words and that it is worth taking them seriously. Individually each of us may ask: Do I transmit hope? Does my presence radiate joy? Do people draw near to me or do they rather move away from me? How do people go away having met me: happier, lighter, hopeful, or drained, tired, and sad? Religious life is a place to dream. Inspiration and hope are not the products of careful committee work and planning sessions. They come about from a heart that is open to all kinds of new possibilities.

They come from a sense of inner freedom. As Pope Francis has said again and again, in order to flourish, religious life requires witnesses to joy. Keeping alive the flame of hope is a challenge as increasingly religious are approached with meaning question. Do I need great things to be happy? Big things happen only occasionally may be the jubilees, most of life is constituted of simple, ordinary routine and it is here that we need to be agents of optimism and joy.

5. **Extroverted mission:** closely connected to the changing landscape is an extroverted mission. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* and in other documents warned us of the danger of being self-referential. At times we may have to play the clown, smile through gloom. Even when feeling rotten inside, we may have to smile at another and encourage another to keep going. The various charisms of religious congregations especially those of the female orders, have a natural propensity to see what is needed in a place, an instinctive sense of what could be done and how it could be done. Recently in a conference on sister-led dialogue on environment, by a well-mixed group of cultures, religions, laity and clergy, they all agreed on one thing. They said: “Sisters can make something out of nothing”. They are gifted with great practical sense and ability to respond promptly and creatively to the situations which present themselves. This is an asset. To be contemplative and active at the same time, engaging, intercultural and mutually enriching by our life and mission. That is the meaning of the synodal exhortation: *enlarge the space of your tent, to spread out your tent clothes, make firm your pegs.*

6. **Strengthening the pastoral dimension:** Changing landscapes in Religious Missionary Life first of all imply that we are pastors: caring, nurturing, listening, and accompanying by our presence. There is a tendency to bind ourselves to institutions with the consequence that we have little time left for family visits, visit to the elderly and sick and other gestures of closeness to people. Participation and inclusion are key

here. Religious congregations represent a wide variety of charisms, and women religious in particular, have access to the strata of society that others do not have. Health, education, social service, women empowerment, child care and protection of the vulnerable, people on the streets, orphans, the lonely elderly, mentally and physically handicapped persons, women and men victims of human trafficking, all these provide a large platform to serve as pastors. By being with the lonely, the seekers, the old and elderly, the widowed and orphaned, the divorced and the separated, we regain the credibility of the church and religious priestly life. It is by being more pastoral that we remedy and heal some of the damage that has been done in church and religious life.

7. **Leadership:** another whole area that is undergoing tremendous changes is leadership. You have spent this day reflecting on it. In the changing scenario, the concepts of power, authority and leadership are debated as never before. Understanding authority and power varies from place to place and culture to culture. There is even a gender-related aspect to leadership, exercise of power and authority, the ability to make decisions and communal and individual understanding of freedom. In some parts of our world, authority is more prone to subjugate, control and create fear. Women religious orders are facing enormous amount of challenges today on the exercise of authority and leadership. Things that some years ago, we would have taken for granted and completely normal, today, comes within the purview of abuse and human rights violations. This calls for careful examination of the way we function in calling for more discernment, more dialogue, deeper listening, deeper prayer life, more humility and more courage. Single handed decision-making should not be encouraged. Allotting secondary roles to women must be stopped and a formation (of seminarians) that seeks pursuit of privileges, and economic and social influence must be avoided. Certain names, titles, ways of appearing that express greatness and power and fame do not

resonate in a synodal way. The prayer of R. Tagore comes to my mind here: “give me the strength never to disown the poor or to bend my knees before insolent might”. There is no need to crouch before others nor expect others to crouch before you. It has implications for clergy/religious -lay relationship. Consecrated life should not be seen as superior to other states of life. The way I see things, I treat persons, must be deeply Jesus- inspired and gospel- based. Baptism is the fundamental basis for our equality in Christ, the synodal document is very strong on this.

8. **Facing difficulties:** how we embrace the changing landscape will a lot depend on the way we handle difficulties. The departure of our members through death or at will, the scandals that engulf church and religious life today, the painfully slow progress in some missions can overwhelm those at the helm. The criticism the church is facing from various quarters, on some of its doctrines, practices, moral teachings and structures are at the same time opportunities to reroute our journeys once again in the direction God is showing us. The Catholic Church is a good punch bag. How do we handle the criticisms that come from the “outsider” of our culture, and the “outsider” of our church? We can get disappointed and resentful or we can use them as opportunities to work on ourselves, to improve, to be more credible, integrated and fruitful. As insiders we may not see what is wrong with the way we are going about; often it is the outsider who will point out things that they see and we do not. As I said before, we can overcome many of our difficulties through a renewed commitment of being close to people who face difficulties.
9. **Networking and collaboration:** it is a must for our future together. By our way of life and functioning we bear testimony to the world that it is possible to live and work together. It is possible to live with differences and still be effective. UISG is witnessing an unparalleled level of networking among women religious. Women religious are coming together,

joining hands in pooling the resources together, standing in solidarity and support, helping each other cope with the crisis and the challenges each is facing in its unique context. If we have a future I believe, it is a future together.



Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters, the world situation right now, is undergoing rapid changes. The wars, the energy crisis, the refugee crisis, and Brexit changed a lot in Europe making it more vulnerable. Similar situations are found in the church. Changing landscape asks for changes in mentality, organisation and style of functioning. Today things are happening more in the open, the mystery and aura surrounding religious life is slowly waning and matters are discussed in the open forum and this is a good sign. I hope that these few thoughts that I have shared with you together with those of my fellow panelists, will evoke further discussion and sharing in this seminar.







Holy Spirit, fulfil in us the work begun by Jesus.
Make fruitful and steadfast the prayer we make on behalf of the whole world.
Hasten the hour when each of us will achieve a deep
interior life.
Invigorate our work that it may reach all peoples,
All those redeemed by the blood of Christ and all his inheritance.
May no vain attachment hinder the work of our vocation.
May no personal interest cause us to shrink from the demands of justice.
May no personal scheming cause us to reduce love to our own petty dimensions.
May all be noble in us: the search and the reverence for truth, the readiness to
sacrifice even to the cross and death.
And may all be accomplished according to the
Last prayer of the Son to his Heavenly Father,
And according to the grace which Father and Son
Give through you, the Spirit of love, to the
Church and to her institutions, to each soul and to all peoples
Amen, amen, Alleluia, alleluia.



ON WE GO...keeping trust in the future,
because God is present in our daily reality.

We need to search Him together in order to meet Him
and understand the message and the Mission He gives us.

We need to find new ways of proclaiming the Gospel,
interpreting Charisms and living Spirituality together with
people in their own cultures and languages.