



"Missionary Institutes and Synodality: Charism, Prophecy, and Mission."

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SEDOS

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Editorial

Missionary Institutes and Synodality



Dear Members and Readers,

This issue of the SEDOS Bulletin compiles key insights from the recent Residential Seminar on “Missionary Institutes and Synodality: Charism, Prophecy,

and Mission.” The large number of attendees underscored the widespread interest in these themes within religious and missionary life, and the presentations were met with high praise.

The seminar began with an introduction by Mary Barron, OLA, President of SEDOS, who called for a deeper engagement with the intersection of missionary institutes and synodality. She framed the seminar as an urgent invitation for missionary institutes to reflect on their unique calling, challenging them to embrace the prophetic dimension of their vocations through dialogue, discernment, and shared responsibility. Barron also introduced the “Conversation in the Spirit” (CIS) — a prayerful, three-stage process designed to foster deep, communal listening and discern the Holy Spirit’s guidance.



Fabio Ciardi, OMI, presented on “Charism, Prophecy, and Witness,” arguing that charisms are essential to the Church’s synodal path. He

stressed that charisms cannot exist in isolation; they must be shared and deeply interconnected with the entire People of God. Ciardi emphasized that this synodal approach applies at every level, from within individual institutes to collaboration among different charisms and ecclesial vocations.

In his presentation, Márcio Flávio Martins explored the role of “Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church.” He described prophets as courageous figures who challenge injustice and proclaim hope, underscoring that all baptized individuals are called to this mission. Martins highlighted the importance of a counter-cultural and dialogical approach, pointing to modern prophets and the use of digital platforms to share God’s truth.

Following each presentation, speakers posed challenging questions to the participants, and this bulletin features the inspiring responses that emerged from their reflections and spiritual conversations.

The group reports included in this issue highlight that synodality is a continuous process of conversion and a shared journey. Key takeaways from the seminar included:

- Viewing charism as a communal gift.
- The call to be prophetic witnesses.
- The importance of collaboration with other institutes and lay people.

The “Conversation in the Spirit” method received particular praise for its ability to foster deep listening and inclusivity. Participants were challenged to shift from an “I” to a “we” mentality and to go to the “peripheries” to advocate for the voiceless. The



seminar underscored the need for an inclusive mission, networking, and a renewed focus on prayer and discernment. Feedback also offered suggestions for improvement, such as balancing listening time and increasing speaker diversity.

Bro. René Stockman, F.C., offered final observations, emphasizing that a synodal journey is about humbly walking together, guided by the Holy Spirit. He urged participants to abandon clericalism and self-sufficiency for a relational identity rooted in mutual responsibility. Bro. Stockman views interculturality as a key challenge that finds its common ground in the Gospel, while seeing charism as a dynamic, shared gift. For him, prophecy is a way of life that combats injustice and radiates God's love through compassionate acts. He stressed that a true witness requires vulnerability, collaboration, and a willingness to fully embrace the gifts of others, including the laity.



A concluding statement from the seminar highlighted that the seventy missionaries, representing thirty institutes and thirty-two nationalities, committed to building a more just and peaceful world amidst global conflict. They passionately reaffirmed their mission to be prophetic witnesses of God's love, urging leaders to choose peace over destruction and praying for the Church to become a bridge of healing for all humanity.

The SEDOS Residential Seminar illuminated the profound and urgent call for Missionary

Institutes to embrace synodality as a pathway to renewed charism, vibrant prophecy, and authentic mission. The rich discussions, rooted in the "Conversation in the Spirit," underscored that true communion is forged through shared discernment, mutual respect, and a collective commitment to journeying together. The unique gifts of Missionary Institutes are indispensable to the Church's synodal path. By fostering internal synodality, engaging prophetically with the world's peripheries, and living their charisms in deep interconnectedness with the entire People of God, these institutes can become powerful agents of transformation,

embodying the liberating truth of the Gospel in a world yearning for hope and justice. The insights gathered in this bulletin serve as a testament to the Spirit's active presence, inviting us all to deeper engagement and co-responsibility in the Church's ongoing mission.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD

Director of SEDOS



Mary T. Barron, OLA

Welcome Address

Missionary Institutes and Synodality – Charism, Prophecy, and Mission

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Members of SEDOS, Honoured Guests,



It is with profound joy and gratitude that I welcome you to the SEDOS Residential Seminar 2023.

As we gather here today, we stand at a pivotal moment in the life of the Church, one that calls us to discern deeply, to listen attentively, and to respond courageously to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The theme of our seminar — *Missionary Institutes and Synodality: Charism, Prophecy, and Mission* — is not merely a topic of discussion, but an urgent invitation to reflect on our specific call as Missionary Institutes in the light of synodality. In a time when the Church seeks renewal and deeper communion, we are challenged to embrace the prophetic dimension of our vocations with renewed vigour, shaping our mission with the spirit of dialogue, discernment, and co-responsibility.

Speaking to the Society of African Missions just 10 days ago, Pope Leo spoke of them, and by inference of all Missionary Institutes, saying that they are “a sign of that missionary spirit which is at the very heart of the Church’s life” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273). He reminded them that their “*Founder’s advice ... remains ever timely: in your proclamation, be faithful to the simplicity of the apostolic preaching, and be always ready to embrace the ‘folly of the Cross’*” (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-25) with sincerity and peace, even in the face of the world’s

incomprehension and derision. Be free of all conditioning as men [and women] ‘filled’ with Christ, and thus capable of bringing your brothers and sisters to an encounter with him, since you are motivated by a sole aspiration: to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world” (cf. Phil 1:12-14, 21). He concluded with the encouraging and challenging statement: “*What a great sign for the entire Church and the world!*”

During these days, as we reflect on our specific call as Missionary Institutes in the light of synodality, this question will be in the background: in what way are we called today to be this “*great sign for the entire Church and the world?*”

In preparing this Residential Seminar, we, the Members of the SEDOS Executive Committee were convinced of the need as Missionary Institutes to deepen our reflection on the call to missionaries today in the light of Synodality. When the entire Church is experiencing an awakening towards becoming missionary disciples, what is the “more” being asked of the Missionary Institutes?

We were also convinced that we wanted this residential seminar to be a synodal experience for all participants. And this requires the commitment of all of us gathered here to prepare our own reflections as we speak with *parrhesia*, to open our minds and hearts to deep listening, to encounter.

Synodality is not simply a method; it is a way of being Church together. It calls us to walk together, to listen to the voices of all God’s people, and to recognize the Spirit’s presence in the collective journey of faith. For us as missionary institutes, synodality illuminates our



charisms, urging us to remain faithful to our roots while responding dynamically to the needs of our time. We are not merely institutions, we are living witnesses, called to embody the Gospel and proclaim its message with authenticity and courage. As we journey together synodally, it is not only our method of being missionary that is transformed, but our very understanding of the Gospel message we are called to proclaim. *In this year in which the Church celebrates the ordinary jubilee as Pilgrims of Hope, Pope Francis in his message for World Mission Day 2013 reminded us to be "Missionaries of Hope Among all Peoples" reminding the community of the dignity of our fundamental vocation to be, in the footsteps of Christ, messengers and builders of hope.... Faced with the urgency of the mission of hope today, Christ's disciples are called first to discover how to become "artisans" of hope and restorers of an often distracted and unhappy humanity."*

In a recent talk, Timothy Radcliffe OP, spoke of Synodality and The Culture of Encounter. In a world culture and society increasingly marked by division and polarization, he spoke of the call today, of the task of the Synod, and thus the task of synodality as being

more exciting and radical than just overcoming a polarization in society, it is to be a sign of the Christ who draws all to himself when he is lifted up... this is a marvellous vocation for the Church in a time of social disintegration, increasing violence and war.

As the Global Church is called to live interculturality, to embrace the vast plurality of cultures in her membership, in our Missionary Institutes we must be living signs, showing how intercultural living is not only possible, but fruitful and generative. Now that is a true challenge for all of us! Is our intercultural living fruitful and generative?

As Radcliffe describes it: *"Interculturality for us, you could say is the womb of revelation".* The further we go on our intercultural journeys within Congregations, among Congregations, with those cultures in which we live and witness, the more the fullness of our missionary call is revealed to us, and the more fully we

understand the Gospel message we are called to proclaim as living witnesses.

Radcliffe explored in depth the type of encounter to which we are called in synodality. When I hear the word 'encounter' it reminds me immediately of our dear Pope Francis. May he rest in perfect peace. It is a word he used very frequently – the importance of encounter as Christians. But more than simply speak about the importance of encounter, Pope Francis lived this message, his sense of being present to each and every person he met, his compassion and care for the peripheries witnessed to the truth about encounter. He said 'We must cultivate a culture of encounter "as Jesus did": not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying "what a shame, poor people!", but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; "and then to draw near, to touch and to say: "Do not weep" and to give at least a drop of life".'

In his exploration of The Culture of Encounter in Synodality, Radcliffe captures the heart of reciprocity as essential for synodality, urging us to move beyond complementarity, which fits pieces neatly together, towards reciprocity, which opens a dynamic and evolving dialogue – allowing identities to be discovered in relationship rather than predetermined. As missionaries, as we embrace our diversity of charisms, our diversity of states of life, our diversity of gender, in relationship with each other, each one of us understands at an ever-deeper level our identity, our charism, our call.

Radcliffe highlights that true mutuality is about an ongoing exchange, like waves shaping each other in the sea. This reciprocity transforms our understanding of roles – whether in ministry, or cultural diversity, we are equal, but different, and shaped by encounter.

The challenge for all of us is how we embody this as we embrace the synodal journey. What gestures can reveal the life-giving encounters at the heart of synodality? How do we renew our language, imagination, and mutual understanding, our reciprocity? As Pope Francis teaches, the culture of encounter requires



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bear fruit in the authentic living out of our charisms for today, thus contributing to the synodal renewal and reform of the entire Church? How are we being called to be prophets in today's world? How can our mission reflect the unity, diversity, and hope of a Church that listens, learns, and loves?

Let us embark on this seminar with open hearts and minds, ready to listen, ready to dialogue, and above all, ready to be transformed by the Spirit who calls us forward. May our discussions be fruitful, our encounters be enriching, and our resolutions be courageous.

listening, touching, and allowing ourselves to be moved.

During these days of reflection, prayer, and exchange, may we seek to discern what the Spirit is saying to us. How can we as Missionary Institutes enter into the womb of revelation that is our intercultural living in a way that generates life? How can we intentionally foster reciprocal relationships that

Welcome to this sacred time of discernment and renewal. May the Lord bless our journey together.

Thank you.



Charism

Missionary Institutes and synodality – charism, prophecy and witness



Questo mio intervento prende avvio dalla convinzione che i carismi sono parte costitutiva del cammino sinodale. La Chiesa non può camminare senza i

carismi, che fanno parte della sua natura, e i carismi non possono camminare da soli, ma soltanto se pienamente inseriti in tutto il popolo di Dio.

«Nessuno è cristiano da solo!», ha detto papa Leone XIV ai rappresentanti dei Movimenti ecclesiali e delle nuove comunità. «Siamo parte di un popolo, di un corpo che il Signore ha costituito» (6 giugno 2025). Ricordiamo molte le prime parole della sua saluto annuale: «A tutti voi, fratelli e sorelle di Roma, d'Italia, di tutto il mondo: vogliamo essere una Chiesa sinodale, una Chiesa che cammina, una Chiesa che cerca sempre la pace, che cerca sempre la carità, che cerca sempre di essere vicino specialmente a coloro che soffrono» (8 maggio 2025).

Il cammino sinodale avviato da papa Francesco (per la verità avviato dallo Spirito Santo il giorno di Pentecoste) continua! E noi ne siamo protagonisti.

I carismi trovano la loro piena identità in questo cammino, nella condivisione del proprio dono, perché la condivisione è nella natura stessa del carisma. Nello stesso tempo la condivisione arricchisce il carisma consentendogli la piena manifestazione delle potenzialità in esso racchiuse. In questo cammino fatto insieme e nella reciproca condivisione vi è infatti un di più che va oltre la somma delle componenti, un di più che ha la consistenza mistica nel Signore. Riscritto presente tra quanti sono uniti nel suo

nome. È ben più della semplice cooperazione. «La vita cristiana – ha ricordato in proposito papa Leone – non si vive nell'isolamento, come se fosse un'avventura intellettuale o sentimentale, confinata nella nostra mente e nel nostro cuore. Si vive con gli altri, in un gruppo, in una comunità, perché Cristo riscritto si rende presente fra i discepoli riuniti nel suo nome» (6 giugno 2025).

Seguirò cinque punti, a cerchi sempre più ampi, con una conclusione "metodologica":

1. Carismi personali in relazione all'interno del medesimo carisma.
2. Carismi in relazione all'interno della Famiglia carismatica.
3. Carismi in relazione tra di loro.
4. Carismi in relazione con le diverse vocazioni ecclesiali.
5. Carismi in relazione con il mondo.
6. Un metodo per la comunione.

1. Carismi personali in relazione all'interno del medesimo carisma

Mi dilagherò abbastanza in questo primo punto, perché sono convinto che se non riusciamo a vivere la sinodalità all'interno del proprio Istituto, sarà molto difficile viverla nel più ampio raggio ecclesiale.

Non possiamo pensare il carisma dell'Istituto come una realtà monolitica, anonima. «La vita religiosa – ha rilevato papa Francesco il 7 novembre 2022 parlando ai membri dell'Istituto di vita consacrata "Claretianum" – si comprende solo da ciò che lo Spirito fa in ciascuna delle persone chiamate»¹. Ogni persona è invitata a offrire un proprio apporto per la comprensione e l'attuazione del carisma. Come ricorda l'Istruzione *Mutuae relationes*, «Anche ai singoli religiosi certamente non mancano i doni

¹ Andare alla fonte per avere notizie sulla missione, in *L'Espresso* romano, 7-XI-2022, 16.

personali, i quali indubbiamente sogliono provenire dallo Spirito [si tratta dunque di "carismi" personali], al fine di arricchire, sviluppare e ringiovanire la vita dell'Istituto nella coesione della comunità e dare testimonianza di rinnovamento» (n. 12).

Il primo livello della relazione tra carismi domanda dunque di essere vissuto all'interno del comune carisma che caratterizza un Istituto missionario, per sua natura comunitario, collettivo, partecipato, condiviso, fatto dal convergere di una molteplicità di persone attorno al medesimo progetto.

Il bisogno di condivisione carismatica nasce dalla consapevolezza che ogni membro dell'Istituto è un *unicum*, irripetibile, indispensabile: oggetto d'amore personale da parte di Dio, con una vocazione propria nella comune vocazione, arricchito di doni particolari che non sono soltanto per lui, ma per essere messi a servizio della medesima missione, in modo che vi sia un unico convergere di tutti i membri della Famiglia, in una dinamica di unità che arricchisce e potenzia il comune carisma, così che possa dare la massima efficacia nel servizio alla Chiesa. «E nella comunione, anche se costa fatica, che un carisma si rivela autenticamente e misteriosamente fecondo», leggiamo nell'Esortazione apostolica *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 130).

Mi sembrano significativi i verbi dinamici e attivi che *Mutuae relationes* impiega per indicare il contributo che i singoli membri di un Istituto sono chiamati a offrire con i loro personali carismi: "arricchire, sviluppare e ringiovanire". *Arricchire*: il patrimonio carismatico ricevuto occorre farlo fruttare ulteriormente. *Sviluppare*: il carisma, nella sua ricchezza, contiene elementi ancora non pienamente espressi che attendono di essere portati alla luce con intraprendenza, sperimentazione, creatività. *Ringiovanire*: il carisma ha bisogno di essere attualizzato in contesti culturali sempre nuovi, con la sensibilità del proprio tempo. È il compito di ciascuno, chiamato a rendersi responsabile attivo, protagonista nel portare avanti la missione dell'Istituto.

Occorre offrire spazio alla singola persona, dare la possibilità di esprimere le diversità, liberare i doni di ognuno: se vissuti con coordinazione e

armonia, costituiscono una via per la realizzazione della persona e un arricchimento per l'intero gruppo.

«Il primo servizio di cui ciascuno è debitore all'altro – scrive Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *La vita comunitaria dei cristiani* – consiste nell'ascoltare l'altro. Come il nostro amore per Dio comincia con l'ascolto della sua Parola, allo stesso modo l'amore per il fratello comincia imparando ad ascoltarlo. L'amore di Dio per noi si esprime non solo nel dono a noi della sua Parola, ma anche nel suo prestare a noi orecchio. E noi, di pari, compiamo la sua stessa opera verso il fratello quando impariamo ad ascoltarlo»¹.

È questo grande teologo e testimone della fede in tempi bui, per situazioni così simili a quelle che viviamo anche oggi, ci interpella e mette in guardia: «Chi non riesce a dare retta al proprio fratello, finisce per non ascoltare più neppure Dio stesso e per voler sempre lui parlare. La morte della vita spirituale comincia qui e, alla fine, non sopravvive altro che la chiacchiere spirituale, quella sorta di condiscendenza clericale che soffoca ogni cosa con le parole devote»².

È un tema che era particolarmente caro a papa Francesco, convinto che l'unità è molteplice:

L'uniformità non è cattolica, non è cristiana. [...] L'unità non è uniformità, non è fare obbligatoriamente tutto insieme, né pensare allo stesso modo, neppure perdere l'identità. Unità nella diversità è precisamente il contrario, è riconoscere e accettare con gioia i diversi doni che lo Spirito Santo dà ad ognuno e metterli al servizio di tutti nella Chiesa. Unità è saper ascoltare, accettare le differenze, avere la libertà di pensare diversamente e manifestarlo! Con tutto il rispetto per l'altro che è mio fratello. Non abbiate paura delle differenze!³.

Quante sensibilità diverse, quante diverse sottolineature del medesimo mistero cristiano! Basta che vi sia l'accoglienza reciproca riconoscendo le differenze di cui ognuno è coetatore, lasciandosi arricchire dalle molteplici

¹ D. Bonhoeffer, *La vita comunitaria dei cristiani*, a cura di Natale Benatti, Roma 2015, p. 156.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Discorso alle Caritas Fraternità of Charismatic Renewal Communities and Fellowship*, 31-X-2014.



prospettive, senza irrigidimenti, esclusioni, condanne. Anche su questo l'insegnamento di papa Francesco è illuminante.

Le differenze tra le persone e le comunità a volte sono fastidiose, ma lo Spirito Santo, che suscita questa diversità, può trarre da tutto qualcosa di buono e trasformarlo in dinamismo evangelizzatore che agisce per situazione. La diversità dell'essere sempre riconciliata con l'aiuto dello Spirito Santo, solo Lui può spicciatire la diversità, la pluralità, la molteplicità e, al tempo stesso, realizzare l'unità. Invece, quando siamo noi che pretendiamo la diversità e ci rinchiodiamo nei nostri particolarismi, nei nostri escludimenti, provochiamo la divisione e, d'altra parte, quando siamo noi che vogliamo costruire l'unità con i nostri piani umani, finiamo per imporre l'uniformità, l'omologazione. Questo non aiuta la missione della Chiesa (n. 131).

Quando il dono personale è particolarmente forte e fecondo, la tentazione è di eccedere, creando iniziative proprie, in autonomia, come se si fosse un *freelance*, a volte fino a lasciare l'Istituto per dare piena libertà di iniziativa alla propria creatività. Oppure, quando si ha l'impressione che il carisma personale non venga sufficientemente riconosciuto o valorizzato, si può cadere nella depressione, nel rispecchiamento, nell'inedia. La via regale è quella della "condivisione dei carismi" personali: mettere al servizio del carisma comune la propria creatività, fantasia, le energie, la passione, i talenti di cui si è dotati.

Il valore del governo di un Istituto si misura dalla capacità di riconoscere le doti dei membri, di favorirle, di orientarle costantemente verso la medesima missione, così da potenziare l'apporto che ogni opera è chiamata a dare alla Chiesa, evitando fughe solitarie e digressioni che potrebbero snaturare la natura dell'Istituto, garantendo l'unità della famiglia carismatica nella varietà dei ministeri e delle culture, mantenendo l'identità propria. *Manus relationes* invita i singoli religiosi ad agire "nella coesione della comunità" (n. 12).

Costituire una comunità non è semplicemente costruire spazi comuni, di libertà intese individualisticamente o di agì coesivi. Lo sottolinea Maurizio Bevilacqua in una sua pubblicazione sulla sinodalità nella vita

consacrata: «è necessario che venga costruito un "noi comunitario" che faccia crescere ciascuno. Ciò deve accogliere le diversità come un dono e deve esprimere un impegno per un'integrazione positiva. Questo può essere anche un servizio che la vita consacrata offre alla società di oggi, sempre più multiculturale»¹.

Non c'è futuro per la vita consacrata se non si mettono le persone in condizione di essere propositive e se le persone non si fanno carico, con audacia e creatività, della vita e della missione dell'Istituto in tutti i suoi aspetti.

Ci vuole sapienza nel valorizzare i doni e talenti diversi, nell'aiutarli a comporsi in armonia, evitando gelosie, pretese, ma gioendo del contributo specifico e irripetibile che ciascuno apporta. Per la paura di morire, vari Istituti sono portati a concedere "spazi" non a persone libere, ma a chi pensa di dare nuovo volto al carisma attraverso scelte imprenditoriali². C'è il pericolo di dare «libera intraprendenza» all'uno o l'altro religioso o religiosa di avviare progetti secondo i modelli di imprese³. Le risposte evangeliche richiama di essere traviate «in risposte misurate sull'efficienza e la razionalità "da impresa"»⁴. E si finisce con il distaccarsi fortemente dalla raccomandazione di papa Francesco: «Non dobbiamo formare amministratori, gestori, ma padri, fratelli, compagni di cammino» e non "funzionalisti"⁵. Se in una comunità non si vive una "sinodalità" vera, difficilmente si è capaci di aprirsi agli altri in una dimensione più ampia di condivisione con altri carismi.

2. Carismi in relazione all'interno della Famiglia carismatica

Nella *Lettera per l'Anno della vita consacrata* (2014) papa Francesco parlò, forse per la prima volta almeno nella terminologia, di "Famiglie carismatiche", composte da Istituti maschili e

¹ M. Bevilacqua, *Fare strada insieme. La sinodalità nella vita consacrata*, Reggae, Roma 2024.

² R. Cusani, *Nuovi carismi nati da solo. La fine degli spazi chiusi*, EDB, Bologna 2017, pp. 37-38.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴ Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e la Società di Vita Apostolica, *Scrivete*, n. 78.

⁵ A. Spadaro, *Svegliare il mondo. Colloquio di Papa Francesco con i Superiori Generali*, in «La Chiesa Cattolica», 165 (2014/1), p. 10.

femminili, religiosi, membri di Istituti secolari e laici che insieme condividono lo stesso carisma. Di fatto attorno ad ogni famiglia religiosa, come anche alle Società di vita apostolica e agli stessi Istituti secolari, è presente una famiglia più grande, la "famiglia carismatica", che comprende più Istituti che si riconoscono nel medesimo carisma, e soprattutto cristiani laici che si sentono chiamati, proprio nella loro condizione laicale, a partecipare della stessa realtà carismatica¹⁰.

Gli antichi Ordini hanno una lunga esperienza in merito: il medesimo carisma è vissuto in modalità consacrata maschile (primo ordine), in modalità consacrata femminile (secondo ordine), in modalità laicale (terzo ordine). Attorno ai diversi Ordini è poi sorta una costellazione di Istituti che si ispirano al medesimo carisma. Ma anche una congregazione come quella di cui faccio parte, i Missionari Oblati di Maria Immacolata, condivide il proprio carisma con una quarantina di Istituti di vita consacrata e secolari e con un numero indefinito di associazioni laicali.

Gli appelli che papa Francesco ha rivolto in questi anni alle Famiglie carismatiche sono stati un invito pressante alla condivisione dei carismi all'interno dell'unico carisma. Particolarmente significative le parole rivolte ai Camilliani in occasione del loro capitolo generale:

Dal carisma suscitato inizialmente in San Camillo, si sono via via costituite varie realtà ecclesiali che formano oggi un'unica costellazione, cioè una "famiglia carismatica" composta di religiosi, religiose, consacrati secolari e fedeli laici. Nessuna di queste realtà è da sola depositaria o detentrica unica del carisma, ma ognuna lo riceve in dono e lo interpreta e attualizza secondo la sua specifica vocazione, nei diversi contesti storici e geografici. Al centro rimane il carisma originario, come una fonte perenne di luce e di ispirazione, che viene compreso e incarnato in modo dinamico nelle diverse forme. Ognuna di esse viene offerta alle altre in uno scambio reciproco di doni che arricchisce tutti, per l'utilità comune e in vista dell'attuazione della medesima missione. [...] Cari fratelli e sorelle, vi incoraggio a coltivare sempre tra voi

la comunione, in quello stile sinodale che ho proposto a tutta la Chiesa, in ascolto gli uni gli altri e tutte e tutti in ascolto dello Spirito Santo, per valorizzare l'apporto che ogni singola realtà offe all'unica Famiglia, così da esprimere più compiutamente le molteplici potenzialità che il carisma racchiude. Siate sempre più consapevoli che "è nella comunione, anche se costa fatica, che un carisma si rivela autenticamente e misteriosamente fecondo" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 110)¹¹.

Oggi vi è una "Associazione Famiglie carismatiche in dialogo", riconosciuta e fatta propria dalle due Unioni di Superiori e Superiori generali, che raduna regolarmente molte Famiglie carismatiche. È una via concreta per facilitare la reciproca conoscenza, relazione e amicizia tra i membri delle Cune Generalizie e delle Associazioni che appartengono alle varie Famiglie carismatiche, per favorire lo studio in comune dell'identità, della funzione e delle sfide delle varie componenti di ogni Famiglia carismatica, per condividere le esperienze in atto, per sostenere la ricerca dei metodi più idonei per un più efficace sviluppo e azione, per promuovere effettivamente l'impegno nei diversi campi della nuova evangelizzazione.

Senza questo respiro ampio che viene dalla molteplicità di modi di vivere il medesimo carisma, un Istituto rischia di atrofizzarsi. Nella misura in cui siamo capaci di lasciare che persone di vocazioni diverse attualizzino il comune carisma nel loro ambiente, e secondo la natura della loro vocazione, esso potrà esprimersi in modo nuovo, creativo, e quindi aiutare reciprocamente tutti i gruppi che a esso afferiscono a una sua migliore comprensione. Dunque: cammino sinodale all'interno della medesima Famiglia carismatica.

3. Carismi in relazione tra di loro

Veniamo ora al terzo livello di comunione, quello tra carismi diversi.

Il 6 giugno 2013, per la prima volta papa Leone ha avuto occasione di esprimersi in merito, incontrando rappresentanti di tre differenti carismi: Terz'Ordine Regolare di San Francesco, Società delle Missioni Africane, Istituto dei Servi del Paraclito. Ha messo in luce la varietà e l'unità, la bellezza della loro

¹⁰ Lettera per l'Anno della vita consacrata, III, 1.

¹¹ Discorso alla famiglia camilliana, 18-III-2019.

armonia nell'unica Chiesa di Dio: «Voi qui rappresentate tre realtà carismatiche nate in momenti diversi della storia della Chiesa, in risposta ad esigenze contingenti di varia natura, ma unite e complementari nella bellezza armonica del Corpo mistico di Cristo (cfr Cost. dogm. *Lumen gentium*, 7). Carismatici, grazie per la vostra visita, che oggi in questa sala ci mostra la Chiesa in tre dimensioni luminose della sua bellezza».

È inconcepibile vivere il proprio carisma ed esercitare il ministero ad esso legato al di fuori della comunione con tutti gli altri carismi e ministeri. Soltanto nel rapporto di unità si comprende la radice comune che li unisce tra loro e il "divino" che ognuno di essi esprime. Nello stesso tempo in questo rapporto di unità si può cogliere la peculiarità di ciascuno e giungere a una graduale acquisizione sperimentale della "mirabile varietà" di cui la Chiesa è ricca. Questo fa sentire il proprio carisma e il proprio Istituto non come una realtà assoluta, ma come parte di una realtà più vasta, inserita in un organismo vivente.

Ogni carisma, ha insegnato l'apostolo Paolo, è un dono per tutta la comunità e, nello stesso tempo, ha bisogno del dono degli altri carismi. Siamo cattolici, trasparenti, aperti gli uni agli altri, pronti a donare come a ricevere, vivendo la "comunione dei santi", la realtà della Chiesa comunione: "tutto è vostro: Paolo, Apollo, Cefa [attualizzando, potremmo dire: Francesco, Ignazio, Teresa d'Avila, ma anche padre Pio, Madre Teresa, Escrivà de Balaguer, Chiara Lubich...] il mondo, la vita, la morte, il presente, il futuro: tutto è vostro! Ma voi siete di Cristo e Cristo è di Dio" (cfr. 1Cor 3,22-23). Illuminando questo testo di Paolo dove le molte appartenenze confluiscono nell'unica definitiva appartenenza, in Cristo, a Dio. Che respiro grande, che vastità di orizzonti, che liberazione dal miope particolarismo.

La Madre Chiesa nella liturgia ci nutre con gli scritti dei padri e dei santi di tutti i tempi, di tutti i luoghi, di tutte le correnti spirituali: ci fa celebrare le loro feste, ce li propone come esempi, sicura che se un francescano è attento all'insegnamento sull'orazione di Teresa d'Avila con ciò non lascia il cammino di san Francesco, se un benedettino legge san Francesco di Sales non devia dalla sua strada.

La condivisione è nella natura del carisma. Sì, «nessun carisma basta da solo», come titola un suo libro Pino Cozza. La comunione tra i diversi carismi è un'esperienza davvero arricchente: si contempla la varietà, la bellezza e ciò è fonte di gioia, di comunione ecclesiale.

L'invito rivolto dall'Istruzione *Ripartire da Cristo* costituisce un chiaro programma in merito:

La comunione che i consacrati e le consacrate sono chiamati a vivere va ben oltre la propria famiglia religiosa o il proprio Istituto. Aprendosi alla comunione con gli altri Istituti e le altre forme di consacrazione, possono dilatare la comunione, riscoprire le comuni radici evangeliche e insieme cogliere con maggiore chiarezza la bellezza della propria identità nella varietà carismatica, come tralci dell'unica vite. Dovrebbero gareggiare nella stessa vicendevoles (cfr. Rm 12, 10) per raggiungere il carisma migliore, la carità (cfr. 1 Cor 12, 31). [...] Non si può più affrontare il futuro in dispersione. È il bisogno di essere Chiesa, di vivere insieme l'avventura dello Spirito e della sequela di Cristo, di comunicare le esperienze del Vangelo, imparando ad amare la comunità e la famiglia religiosa dell'altro come la propria. Le gioie e i dolori, le preoccupazioni e i successi possono essere condivisi e sono di tutti. Anche nei confronti delle nuove forme di vita evangelica si domanda dialogo e comunione (n. 31).

Oggi si parla tanto di "fare rete" tra gli Istituti, il che è importante, ma non basta. La collaborazione e condivisione di risorse, competenze, azioni tra organizzazioni in vista di un obiettivo comune è certamente strategica. Ma nel solo "fare rete" ci può essere ancora qualcosa di utilitaristico, o egoistico... molto diverso dal vivere la "musica dell'incontro", la comunione che richiede la gratuità del dono, mentre «ogni incontro vero con un carisma è l'incontro con una voce che interpellava innanzitutto la gratuità»¹². Ovviamente ciò impegna, costa...

«Camminare insieme significa essere tessitori di unità», ci ricordava papa Francesco nel suo messaggio per la Quaresima del 2025.

Sarà bene, al riguardo, ricordare i molti organismi (il SEDOS è uno di questi) che

¹² R. Cozza, *Nessun carisma basta da solo*, cit., p. 36.

lavorano per la comunione e le collaborazioni tra carismi diversi.

4. Carismi in relazione con le diverse vocazioni ecclesiali

Ogni Famiglia carismatica è chiamata a pensare e vivere il proprio carisma nel più ampio orizzonte della comunione ecclesiale, attenta a tutte le componenti del popolo di Dio, a cominciare da quelle laicali.

La prima volta che papa Leone parla dei carismi, lo fa in questo contesto sinodale. Vale la pena ascoltare parte della sua omelia alla Veglia di Pentecoste con i Movimenti, le associazioni e le nuove comunità, il 7 giugno 2025:

La sera della mia elezione, guardando con commozione il popolo di Dio qui raccolto, ho ricordato la parola "sinodalità", che esprime felicemente il modo in cui lo Spirito modella la Chiesa. In questa parola risuona il *syn* – il *con* – che costituisce il segreto della vita di Dio. Dio non è solitudine: Dio è "con" in sé stesso – Padre, Figlio e Spirito Santo – ed è Dio con noi. Allo stesso tempo, sinodalità ci ricorda la strada – *odds* – perché dove c'è lo Spirito c'è movimento, è cammino. Siamo un popolo in cammino. Questa coscienza non ci allontana ma ci immerge nell'umanità, come il lievito nella pasta, che la fa tutta fermentare. L'anno di grazia del Signore, di cui è espressione il Giubileo, ha in sé questo fermento. In un mondo lacerato e senza pace lo Spirito Santo ci educa infatti a camminare insieme. La terra ripoverà, la giustizia si affermerà, i poveri gioiranno, la pace tornerà se non ci muoveremo più come predatori, ma come pellegrini. Non più ognuno per sé, ma armonizzando i nostri passi ai passi altrui. (...) Carissimi, Dio ha creato il mondo perché noi fossimo insieme. "Sinodalità" è il nome ecclesiale di questa consapevolezza. È la via che domanda a ciascuno di riconoscere il proprio debito e il proprio tesoro, sentendosi parte di un intero, fuori dal quale tutto appassisce, anche il più originale dei carismi. Vedete: tutta la creazione esiste solo nella modalità dell'essere insieme, talvolta pericoloso, ma pur sempre un essere insieme (...). Siate dunque legati profondamente a ciascuna delle Chiese particolari e delle comunità parrocchiali dove alimentate e

spendete i vostri carismi. Attorno ai vostri vescovi e in sintonia con tutte le altre membra del Corpo di Cristo agiremo, allora, in armoniosa sintonia. Le sfide che l'umanità ha di fronte saranno meno spaventose, il futuro sarà meno buio, il discernimento meno difficile. Se insieme obbediremo allo Spirito Santo!

Il giorno precedente aveva raccomandato:

Questa unità, che voi vivete nei gruppi e nelle comunità, estendetela ovunque: nella comunione con i Pastori della Chiesa, nella vicinanza con le altre realtà ecclesiali, facendovi prossimi alle persone che incontrate, in modo che i vostri carismi rimangano sempre a servizio dell'unità della Chiesa e siano essi stessi "lievito di unità, di comunione e di fraternità" (cfr *Omelia*, 18 maggio 2025) nel mondo così lacerato dalla discordia e dalla violenza.

L'esortazione apostolica *Christifideles laici* aveva sottolineato, a più riprese, la circolarità o *pericoranza* delle diverse vocazioni nella Chiesa, la loro intima reciprocità, la loro vicendevole dipendenza. Afferma ad esempio:

Nella Chiesa comunione gli stati di vita sono tra loro così collegati da essere ordinati l'uno all'altro. Certamente comune, anzi unico è il loro significato profondo: quello di essere modalità secondo cui vivere l'eguale dignità cristiana e l'universale vocazione alla santità nella perfezione dell'amore. Sono modalità insieme diverse e complementari, poiché ciascuna di esse ha una sua originale e inconfondibile fisionomia e nello stesso tempo ciascuna di esse si pone in relazione alle altre e al loro servizio (n. 35).

L'esortazione apostolica *Vita consecrata*, a sua volta richiama i «rapporti reciproci» che intercorrono tra le varie forme di vita, «al servizio l'una dell'altra, per la crescita del Corpo di Cristo nella storia e per la sua missione nel mondo» (n. 31). Il documento parla anche della necessità di un mutuo rapporto di comunione per la perfezione della vita e dell'apostolato fra laici, sacerdoti e religiosi¹⁷.

¹⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, nn. 18-20, e specialmente n. 55 e la fine del n. 61.

L'Istruzione *Ripartire da Cristo* nota che la presa di coscienza della vocazione laicale (che riconosce nei laici dei cristiani a pieno titolo e, per il fatto di essere cristiani, chiamati alla santità e alla missione al pari delle persone consacrate) è «motivo di gioia per le persone consacrate, sono tra più vicine agli altri membri del popolo di Dio con cui condividono un comune cammino di sequela di Cristo, in una comunione più autentica, nell'emozione e nella reciprocità, nell'aiuto vicendevole della comunione ecclesiale, senza superiorità o inferiorità» (n. 13).

L'Istruzione prende atto che «si sta instaurando un nuovo tipo di comunione e di collaborazione all'interno delle diverse vocazioni e stati di vita, soprattutto tra i consecrati e i laici». Rileva poi alcune linee concrete di collaborazione: «Gli Istituti monastici e contemplativi possono offrire ai laici una relazione prevalentemente spirituale e i necessari spazi di silenzio e di preghiera. Gli Istituti impegnati sul versante dell'apostolato possono coinvolgerli in forme di collaborazione pastorale. I membri degli Istituti secolari, laici o chierici, entrano in rapporto con gli altri fedeli nelle forme ordinarie della vita quotidiana» (n. 31).

I laici, da parte loro, cosa offrono a religiose e religiosi? Se in altri tempi sono stati soprattutto i religiosi e le religiose a creare, nutrire spiritualmente e dirigere forme aggregative di laici, oggi può succedere che siano i laici e i nuovi Movimenti ecclesiali, con forte maggioranza di laici, con la loro forza carismatica e la loro aderenza ai bisogni della Chiesa attuale, a coinvolgere i religiosi e le religiose, e anche ad aiutarli nel loro cammino spirituale e pastorale. Lo afferma con naturalezza un passo dell'esortazione *Christifideles laici*: «gli stessi fedeli laici possono e devono aiutare i sacerdoti e i religiosi nel loro cammino spirituale e pastorale» (n. 63).

Accanto alle singole persone che vivono il loro impegno cristiano in maniera ordinaria nell'ambito della famiglia, della parrocchia e della comune vita sociale, la vita ecclesiale conosce molteplici forme di associazioni laicali. «La ricca varietà della Chiesa - leggiamo ancora in *Christifideles laici* - trova una sua ulteriore manifestazione all'interno di ciascun stato di vita. Così entro lo stato di vita laicale si devono rilevare "vocazioni", ossia diversi

cammini spirituali e apostolici che riguardano i singoli fedeli laici. Nell'alveo d'una vocazione laicale "comune" fioriscono vocazioni laicali "particolari"» (n. 56). Si tratta di associazioni di preghiera, caritative, di impegno culturale, sociale... Spesso nascono e si organizzano in base ad una autentica vocazione particolare.

In realtà, questa visione della reciprocità delle vocazioni nella Chiesa è iscritta in una pagina luminosa della Costituzione conciliare sulla Chiesa: «In virtù di questa catholicità, le singole parti portano i propri doni alle altre parti e a tutta la Chiesa, di maniera che il tutto e le singole parti si arricchiscono con l'apporto di tutte, che sono in comunione le une con le altre, e coi loro sforzi si orientano verso la pienezza dell'unità. Ne consegue che il Popolo di Dio, non solo si raccoglie da diversi popoli, ma in sé stesso si sviluppa mediante l'unione di vari ordini» (LG 13).

La sfida è dunque quella di ritrovare una più profonda comunione tra tutte le componenti del popolo di Dio così da rispondere all'unica missione. Un'unità che non mortifica le pluralità di vocazione e delle modalità di vivere il Vangelo, ma che anzi le presuppone e le favorisce. Non si possono condurre cammini paralleli all'interno della Chiesa.

Ogni carisma è chiamato a "perdersi" nella comunione ecclesiale entrando nella Chiesa locale e donandosi, per poi tornare alla propria realtà carismatica arricchito dalla comunione con tutte le altre vocazioni. Da sola ogni istituzione religiosa non potrà avere la luce e la forza per affrontare la complessità della società odierna. Dobbiamo metterci insieme, non tanto per concertare strategie comuni - anche queste se e quando sono necessarie - ma soprattutto perché dall'unità, dalla presenza del Signore che dona il suo Spirito, venga ad ogni singolo Istituto la luce per leggere i segni dei tempi, per comprendere l'essenza del proprio carisma, per trovare le vie della sua attuazione oggi.

5. Carismi in relazione con il mondo

Infine, i carismi sono chiamati a porsi in relazione con il mondo, proprio secondo la loro natura: il loro respiro è l'umanità intera. La sinodalità è un cammino a tutto campo. Il carisma non fa vivere per sé stessi, ma proietta "fuori di sé", in costante donazione, unica via perché esso diventi realmente ciò per cui è nato:

vive, si "aggiorna", si apre al futuro nella misura in cui si lascia interpellare dalle domande e dalle necessità sempre nuove a cui è chiamato a rispondere: L'essere Chiesa in uscita¹, il movimento verso le "periferie", non costituiscono soltanto un metodo pastorale, un poete in atto il carisma, ma un metodo ermeneutico per la sua comprensione e il suo sviluppo. Il carisma lo si comprende mettendolo in gioco con la storia, lanciandolo interpellare da essa, nel contatto concreto e quotidiano con le persone in mezzo alle quali è chiamato a vivere e operare e a cui è inviato. Siamo chiamati a camminare con tutti!

Ci si unanizza a contatto con l'umano, con le persone concrete, lì dove esse vivono, nelle periferie finché ad esistenziali, senza tirarsi fuori in nicchie protette: toccare le mani del povero al quale si fa l'elemosina, farsi prossimi, impregnarsi dell'odore delle pecore, senza aver paura di esprimere tenerezza, affetto, vicinanza, superando la cultura dello scarto, contestando la globalizzazione dell'indifferenza...

La prima "infrima" della Chiesa, ha affermato papa Francesco, «deve essere quella dell'atteggiamento... riscaldare il cuore delle persone, camminare nella notte con loro, saper dialogare e anche scendere nella loro notte, nel loro buio senza perdersi»¹². Sono proposte profetiche, la loro attuazione sembra difficile, anzi impossibile. Esse devono comunque restare davanti a noi, con tutta la forza provocatoria, in modo da mantenere viva l'inquietudine e il desiderio del di più.

Il carisma lo si comprende e conserva la sua profetica vitalità coltivando la passione per tutto l'uomo e per tutti gli uomini del proprio tempo e nel proprio ambiente, mettendosi umilmente in atteggiamento di ascolto, di amorevole ricerca, di assoluta disponibilità. Prossimità con gli uomini e le donne di oggi significa accogliere e condividere i valori di cui essi sono portatori, le aspirazioni che li animano, i bisogni e le angosce che li attanagliano, calarsi nel presente assumendo tutto ciò che è umano, ed essere uomini e donne accanto agli uomini e alle donne del nostro tempo, pienamente incarnati, perché solo dal di dentro si possono portare speranza e redenzione. Siamo chiamati ad aprire

il raggio della carità apostolica a tutti gli uomini, specialmente ai più lontani, a tendere l'arco del dialogo fino dove ossa la carità che tutto crede, tutto spera, tutto sopporta...

6. Un metodo per la comunione

Perché la condivisione - nella relazione e nel dialogo - raggiunga quella profondità che conduce alla piena identità è necessario un "metodo", nel senso originario del termine greco: "un cammino da seguire insieme".

Subito viene alla mente il cammino paradigmatico dei due discepoli di Emmaus (cfr. Lc 24,13-37). Il Risorto, accompagnandosi ad essi - è lui la Via -, *diemévousen*, letteralmente: fece ermeneutica, spiegò, interpretò la Scrittura. Vi è, in questo accompagnamento, un grande insegnamento ermeneutico. Quell'unirsi del Risorto al viaggio che i discepoli stavano compiendo sta a indicare come la vita della Chiesa sia un viaggio, e come Cristo continui a essere il viaggiatore che ancora vi si accompagna. E se vedessimo in quei due viandanti i rappresentanti di due razzismi? Potrebbe essere una indicazione per come compiere il "cammino sinodale". Sappiamo che questa parola, sinodo, proviene dal greco, col significato di "percorrere la strada insieme". Non ricordiamo invece che c'è un'altra bella parola latina che parla del camminare insieme: "eo-ire", da cui viene "comet", il nostro "compagno", colui con il quale si compie un comune viaggio: il "compagno di viaggio".

Camminare insieme, come compagni, con il Compagno che si affianca e fa ermeneutica, "spiega il carisma"... Come? Possiamo rileggere una preziosa indicazione di *Perfectos caritatis*: «Con l'amore di Dio diffuso nel cuore per mezzo dello Spirito Santo la comunità come famiglia unita nel nome del Signore gode della Sua presenza» (n. 15). Gode indica la stabilità di una presenza che, secondo il testo conciliare, accompagna il cammino della comunità, così come il Risorto si era fatto compagno di viaggio dei due verso Emmaus. Potremmo prenderlo ad emblema del cammino sinodale all'interno della Famiglia carismatica, tra le diverse vocazioni e carismi ecclesiali, del cammino stesso con tutti gli "uomini di buona volontà". Come allora il Risorto, presente tra persone che vivono diversi

¹ Intervista concessa a Antonio Spadaro, «La Civiltà Cattolica» 3918 (19-22-2011), 462.

carismi, comunicando il suo Spirito, illumina e fa ardere i cuori, consente, potremmo dire, una comprensione non soltanto intellettuale della propria identità spirituale e carismatica, ma un coinvolgimento attivo di tutta la persona, che aderisce pienamente al progetto di Dio e trova la forza per tradurlo in vita. Le "parole" evangeliche di cui ogni carisma è espressione acquistano nuova comprensione e tornano ad essere realtà vive e attuali.

Questa domanda la concordia della carità – una "comunità come famiglia unita nel nome del Signore" –, l'attuazione del "comandamento nuovo" dell'amore reciproco; "l'amore di Dio diffonde nel cuore per mezzo dello Spirito Santo". Il nuovo comandamento dell'amore reciproco può essere attuato non soltanto tra singole persone, ma tra carismi, tra differenti vocazioni ecclesiali, e si esprime nel riconoscimento del dono dell'altro, nel rispetto e nella stima vicendevole, nel dialogo, nella collaborazione. Domanda il sapersi mettere da parte, il dimenticarsi per mettere in luce l'altro. Non imporsi, e nello stesso tempo offrire tutta la ricchezza di esperienza e di vita che il carisma ha operato nei secoli. Accogliere e valorizzare il dono dell'altro.

«Chiunque persegue con altri una finalità apostolica o chiunque è portatore di un carisma – direbbe papa Leone – è chiamato ad arricchire gli altri, spogliandosi di sé. E questo è fonte di libertà e di grande gioia» (6 giugno 2025).

L'istruzione della Congregazione per gli Istituti di vita consacrata e le Società di vita apostolica *La vita fraterna in comune* (1994) raccoglie al riguardo una massa di testi scritturatici e indica la concretezza di questo cammino, vale la pena ricordarli per non rendere troppo aerea la "sinodalità".

Le comunità riprendono quotidianamente il cammino, sorrette dall'insegnamento degli Apostoli: "amatevi gli uni gli altri con affetto fraterno, gareggiate nello stimarvi a vicenda" (Rm 12,10); "abbiate i medesimi sentimenti gli uni verso gli altri" (Rm 12,16); "accoglietevi perciò gli uni gli altri come Cristo accolse voi" (Rm 15,7); "correggetevi l'un l'altro" (Rm 15,14); "aspettatvi gli uni gli altri" (1 Cor

11,33); "mediante la carità siate a servizio gli uni degli altri" (Gal 5,13); "consolatevi a vicenda" (1 Tess 5,11); "sopportandovi a vicenda con amore" (Ef 4,2); "siate invece benevoli gli uni verso gli altri, misericordiosi, perdonandovi a vicenda" (Ef 4,32); "siate sottomessi gli uni agli altri nel timore di Cristo" (Ef 5,21); "pregate gli uni per gli altri" (Gr 5,16); "rivestitevi tutti di umiltà gli uni verso gli altri" (1 Pt 5,5); "siamo in comunione gli uni con gli altri" (1 Gv 1,7); "non stanchiamoci di fare il bene a tutti, soprattutto ai nostri fratelli nella fede" (Gal 6,9-10) (n. 26).

Come tradurre queste parole evangeliche in concreti atteggiamenti di condivisione e collaborazione tra i carismi?

«Non molte missioni, ma un'unica missione. Non introversi e litigiosi, ma estroversi e luminosi». Quest'ultime parole il Papa le pronuncia il 7 giugno 2025 in Piazza San Pietro il cui colonnato diventa quasi un simbolo, «come un abbraccio aperto e accogliente», che esprime magnificamente la comunione della Chiesa, sperimentata da ognuno di voi nelle diverse esperienze associative e comunitarie...».

(Fabio Ciarà, Obiato di Maria Immacolata, professore emerito presso il Pontificio Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum di Roma. Ha insegnato in varie università pontificie romane. Autore di numerose pubblicazioni. Dal 1995 consulente del Dicastero per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica; dal 2022 consulente presso il Dicastero per il Clero. Attualmente direttore del "Servizio generale degli studi oblati" presso la casa generalizia dei Missionari O.M.I.)



Introduction to Conversation in the Spirit

As the Executive Committee of SEDOS, we wanted to use the Conversation in the Spirit Methodology as a way of reflecting at a deep level on what the call is to missionary Institutes in a Synodal Church. I will endeavor to briefly outline the methodology so that we are all clear about the process.

By way of introduction, it is important to bear in mind that it is much more than a methodology or tool and much more than what we typically think of as a conversation.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the first session of the Synod in 2023 stated:

33. In its etymological sense, the term "conversation" does not indicate a generic exchange of ideas, but a dynamic in which the word spoken and heard generates familiarity, enabling the participants to draw closer to one another. The specification "in the Spirit" identifies the authentic protagonist: the desire of those conversing tends towards listening to His voice — Gradually the conversation between brothers and sisters in faith opens the space for a 'hearing together', that is, a listening together to the voice of the Spirit.

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35. This spiritual practice enables us to move from the "I" to the "we": it does not lose sight of or erase the personal dimension of the "I", but recognises it and inserts it into the community dimension.

37. In its concrete reality conversation in the Spirit can be described as a shared prayer with a view to communal discernment for which participants prepare themselves by personal reflection and meditation. They give each other the gift of a meditated word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot.

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43. Conversation in the Spirit is a tool that, even with its limitations, enables listening in

order to discern "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Rev 2:7). Its practice has elicited joy, awe and gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church. The word "conversation" expresses more than mere dialogue: it interweaves thought and feeling, creating a shared vital space. That is why we can say that conversion is at play in conversation. This is an anthropological reality found in different peoples and cultures, who gather together in solidarity to deal with and decide matters vital to the community. Grace brings this human experience to fruition. Conversing "in the Spirit" means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and seeking God's will in an evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit's unmistakable voice can be heard.

In this brief video, Fr. John Dardis, SJ, outlines the starting point for a Conversation in the Spirit, some theological foundations, and then two key elements: active listening and intentional speaking.

VIDEO (See separate transcript)

Now I would like to give a brief overview of how to engage in a Conversation in the Spirit.... There is a handout in the notes which captures in more detail what I am about to share now.

Conversation in the Spirit (CIS)

Preparation

Prepare for the CIS by taking time for silent reflection and prayer as you reflect on the key question offered for the CIS. In this phase we are intentional in going beyond merely an intellectual response to the question, rather, inviting the Spirit to guide our response, allowing it to percolate within us. It is helpful to write down what you are going to share, at least the key points.

Introductions:

As a group, **appoint a facilitator** whose role is to ensure (i) each person has the opportunity to speak and (ii) all speakers respect the time allowance.

It is also helpful at the beginning to **appoint a Group Secretary** whose role is to record the outcome of round three of the sharing, the fruit of the group dialogue that the group desires to share with the entire assembly.

Now a word about the Role of the Facilitator

- Open the CIS with a brief prayer
- Explain the task in each round and invite a volunteer to begin the sharing. Once one person begins, the others follow in a clockwise direction, to the left.
- Use mobile phone to guide the timing of each speaker. It is helpful to set the phone sound to ring when the time is completed (2 or 3 minutes as indicated).
- Ensure that the time allocated to each person is respected
- Alert the speaker when 30 seconds are remaining (a coloured card may be helpful)
- Ensure silence between each person speaking
- Ensure 1-2 minutes silence after round 1 and round 2
- Ask for a 'group representative/secretary' to record the group contribution during Round 3
- Invite someone to pray in thanksgiving at the conclusion of the sharing

The Process: Three Rounds of Sharing

1st round sharing

In this round each person offers their response to the question being considered: (2- 3 min max) There are no comments or responses. It is a simple sharing of each person's discerned wisdom.

- There are no comments or reactions – only attentive listening
- Each person respects the time allocated, ensuring all group members can share comfortably.
- A moment of silence between each person's sharing
- It can be helpful to note what strikes you during the sharing

After Round 1, give 1-2 minutes for silence before beginning round 2, so that each can reflect on what was heard. This allows for some further depth and allows each person to prepare for round 2 which moves to response: what did I hear from others? What touched me most? How did I feel as I listened and why?

2nd round sharing

What did you hear or sense from one another in your group? What is the Spirit moving in you to share of what you heard?

(1-2 min max.) This is no longer what you think, but what you heard from the others in the group. What did you hear and sense?

- There are no comments or reactions – only attentive listening
- Respect the time allocated
- Pause between each speaker
- It can be helpful to take notes on what strikes you as each person speaks
- When everyone has spoken, keep 2 - 3 minutes of silence

3rd round sharing:

What are WE hearing that we would like to share with the large group? What is the Spirit saying to us as a Group?

- Facilitator reminds the group of the task of round 3 which is to discern what the Spirit is saying to us as a Group
- This is a more free flowing dialogue
- General conversation to determine the key points the group will share.
- Not necessary to move in a clockwise direction but important that the facilitator ensures all members have the opportunity to share
- Group secretary records what the group together decides as the 1-2- 3 key points
- When group has concluded, the facilitator invites a volunteer to close the conversation with a prayer of gratitude.

Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church



1. Introduction

Published on October 26, 2024, the final document containing the conclusion of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was

approved by the late Pope Francis, whose memory, legacy, and inspiration are very much alive among us today. *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* is the title of the Final Document, which does not simply mark the end of the Ordinary Assembly but invites and challenges us all to continue the synodal process. The call of the Holy Father to continue the synodal process is, I believe, the primary motivation that led the SEDOS team to choose *"Missionary Institutes and Synodality: Charism, Prophecy and Witness"* as a central theme for this 2025 Residential Seminar. I have been tasked to reflect with you on *Prophecy*. I am aware that this theme is not new for us, nevertheless I find it always thought-provoking and attractive, as it touches the essence of our Christian, missionary, and religious identity.

Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church is the title I am giving to my reflection. I plan to discuss it in three parts. First, I will address the topic in the light of the Holy Scriptures. Second, I will resort to the Magisterium of the Church, especially the Magisterium of the late Pope Francis. Third, I will discuss some challenges and opportunities for religious missionary life to live its prophetic vocation in today's world. I intend to develop all my reflections in a synodal way, that is, reflecting together with you to enter the richness that this topic can offer us.

2. Following the Paths of the Great Prophets of Biblical Tradition

2.1. Prophets in the Old Testament: An overview

The Prophets play a fundamental role in biblical traditions, both in the Old and New Testaments. A separate course would be necessary to cover the biblical content about the prophets in detail, and it would not be feasible to do it now given the available time. As introductory lines and to refresh our memory, there are, in the Old Testament, 17 books dedicated to the prophets even though there are 16 prophetic figures. Prophet Jeremiah contributed with two books: the book of Jeremiah and Lamentations. These books are generally categorized into two groups: the "Major Prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and the "Minor Prophets" (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).

In this session, I will provide a brief overview of some general concepts related to the biblical prophets of the Old Testament and mention some of their writings that, in my opinion, are relevant to the topic I am addressing.

I begin with the premise that the prophets in the Old Testament were people who spoke on God's behalf without fear and filled with a liberating spirit. There is a definition of a prophet on the cover of the book *The Prophets* by Abraham Heschel that captured my attention: "A prophet is a person who sees the world with the eyes of God, who holds God and humanity in one thought at one time, at all times... who suffers harm done to others... living in dismay, he has the power to transcend dismay."¹

Amos and Isaiah, two of the great prophets of the Old Testament, demonstrate how the prophets were aligned with God and thus

¹ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962).

closeness enabled them to see the world with the eyes of God. It was clear to them that they lived to serve God. The Prophet Amos, for example, sees the prophets as servants of the Lord: "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). As for Isaiah, the prophets are those called to prepare the way of the Lord: "A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3).

mission and his willingness to embrace it regardless of anything.

Stephen Bevans, SVD etymologically defines prophets in the following terms:

"... a prophet is someone who 'speaks forth' (Greek: pro ephemi), and this in two senses. In a first sense, once having heard or discerned the Word of God, the prophet faithfully announces a message, either in words... or in deeds. In a second sense more associated with popular notions of a prophet, the prophet 'speaks forth' the future. Such predictions of the future, however, is not mere 'fortune telling,' but the setting out a vision of what God has in store for people in God's plan of salvation..."

The definition provided by Stephen Bevans reveals that the mission of the prophets originates from God and is sustained by Him. The prophets are those who listen to the Word of God and allow themselves to be guided by it in their proclamation and actions. The Word of God becomes a living reality in their lives, enabling them to impact the lives of those who listen to them. Jeremiah 13: 1-11 further elucidates this.

It is a fact that the prophets' messages were always filled

with hope for a better world where peace and justice could truly reign. Their message was of consolation and encouragement. At times they used soft and deeply spiritual language like the prophet Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

There was a message beyond despair. With the prophets we find no reason to give up hope that things could be different than they were. Beyond any doubt was the certainty of God's



The prophets were people of their time. They experienced the hardships and injustices experienced by their contemporaries. They felt the pain of the people and were deeply outraged by the ruthlessness of the oppressors. However, they did not allow themselves to be blocked by suffering, revolt, powerlessness, guilt and fear. They were able to transform all of these into a positive response to the Lord, to follow Him, to proclaim Him and to bear witness to Him among the people. The prophets were those who embraced with courage and determination their mission. Isaiah 6: 1-8 explains the prophets

presence as Isaiah affirms: "So, do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). In the same perspective of direction, Jeremiah says "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

However, the prophets had their feet firmly on the ground. They saw and felt the people's pain and struggles. They did not hesitate to incite in them a deep desire to fight for their liberation. Through their peculiar, provocative and liberating language, the prophets encouraged the oppressed to walk firmly in the ways of the Lord. They denounced courageously everything that was against God's plans. While talking about hope for a better future, their thoughts were equally anchored in the present and sometimes they became indignant, revolted, sometimes angry, very angry, and why not. Their sense of justice led them to strange and unexpected actions or words, as Isaiah tells us:

When reading the Books of the Prophets, I am sometimes amazed by the audacity and acuity they demonstrated in their preaching methods. They developed a style of preaching and living that made them unique and perhaps unrepeatable. Nevertheless, their writing has a great deal to teach us today. It would be a mistake to reflect on **Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church** without referring to the prophets of the Old Testament. They teach us many things, and just to list a few to conclude this session:

- a) The message of the prophets helps us to free ourselves from complacency and indifference in the face of humanity's current dramas.
- b) The message of the prophets helps us to become aware of our mission as servants of God and that we have received from Him the task proclaiming His truth of faith and liberation. We do not proclaim ourselves, but rather, the liberating God.

c) The message of the prophets helps us to set out together with the people of God in the concreteness of life. Eyes attentive to the reality that surrounds us, feet firm in history, liberating faith and transformative action.

d) The message of the prophets helps us overcome any kind of despair, discouragement, and indifference that tends to trap us in a comfort zone away from the reality of people's lives.

e) The message of the prophets provokes and encourages us, supported by the liberating truth of God, to announce and denounce, proclaiming love, justice, and peace.

2.1. Prophets in the New Testament: An overview

The New Testament assured the continuation of the Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament. Acts 2:17-18 places us before the promises of God, saying, "I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." Saint Paul, in his letters to the Ephesians 4:11, asserts that "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers," as a gift to the early Church. In the same letter, Saint Paul sees the prophets as "God's people and also members of his household..." (Ephesians 2:19).

The prophets continue their mission in the New Testament, but now with a fundamental difference from the Old Testament: Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who, through the action of the Holy Spirit, is the one who chooses, empowers and sends them to prophesy. It is Jesus who encourages all his followers to proclaim prophetically the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Addressing the Twelve, Jesus assured them: "...when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20). In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul speaks about prophecy as a gift from the Holy Spirit. "Follow the way of love and

eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

The Gospel according to Matthew uses Isaiah 40:3 to introduce the one who, in the words of the Messiah, was the last of the great prophets. "This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'" (Matthew 3:3). Initially John's mission was to preach repentance and baptize in the Jordan River. However, his mission became clearer when Jesus addressing John's disciples, and later on, the crowd said: "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen

anyone greater than John the Baptist, yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he'" (Matthew 11:10-11). There have been earlier the significant contributions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc. Then, how can John the Baptist be greater than all of them? This is not a difficult question to answer. The greatness of John refers to the privilege he had of announcing Jesus as the Messiah and recognizing his smallness before Him. "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:26-27). Recognizing his smallness in the face of the greatness of Jesus made him the greatest of all prophets.

It is also worth mentioning the audacity of John in denouncing the betrayal of Herodias, Philip's wife, who had an affair with Philip's brother Herod. This provoked Herodias's anger, and she convinced her daughter Salome to ask Herod for John the Baptist's head on a platter (Matthew 14: 3-12).

John the Baptist fulfilled his mission consciously. He knew that he was doing God's work and was always filled with the power of the Holy Spirit

and with a liberating truth. By explicitly proclaiming Jesus through words and deeds, he became an exemplary model of how a disciple of Christ should behave. In fact, John offers us one of the most explicit confessions of faith in the New Testament: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'" (John 1:29). He knew Jesus and made him known to all his listeners.

After having briefly discussed the prophet John the Baptist, let us now turn our attention to Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus spoke about his closeness with His Father. He spoke with authority and courage. He talked about future



anyone greater than John the Baptist, yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:10-11).

There are two fundamental points in Matthew 11:10-11 that I want to highlight: First, though it might sound like a play on words, John the Baptist evokes the prophets of old who prophesied about the coming of a great prophet whose mission was to prophesy the coming of the Lord. Someone chosen to be a messenger, not the message. Someone who is chosen to prepare the way of the Lord. Someone fully aware of his mission.

The second point sounds paradoxical. How can someone be the greatest and yet the least? We

things. He announced the Kingdom of God and denounced the injustices of his time. All of these can lead us to think of Him as a prophet, as he shared common traits with the great prophets of the Old Testament. We can then ask: What was truly new with Jesus? Did he truly inaugurate a new way of being a prophet?

Jesus made it clear to his followers that he did not come to abolish the Prophets. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). Knowing Jesus was a challenging task for those who walked side by side with Him. Upon asking His disciples who people said he was, this was the answer: "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). Identifying Jesus with great prophets like Jeremiah and Elijah was not that bad. After all, they, like Jesus, were chosen and sent by God. They fulfilled their mission in their respective times and contexts. The great dividing line between prophecy and the prophets of the Old and the New Testaments is the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Gospel according to Matthew tells of Jesus going to meet John the Baptist at the Jordan River, requesting baptism. At that moment the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus. A revelation took place, and from that moment on Jesus' public life and ministry began.

Jesus' baptism became a crucial event that laid the foundation for the sacrament of baptism celebrated by the church throughout the centuries. A sacrament that became the gateway to Christian life in which the gift of prophecy or the prophetic vocation is given to all the baptized. The sacrament of baptism imprints a new identity as described by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It unites all the baptized to Christ, who is priest, prophet, and king. Through it, we participate in this three-fold aspects of the Savior's life. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Radcliffe in his book entitled *Take the Plunge* provokes us with the following reflection about this pericope:

*That sounds wonderful but isn't the language rather inflated? Most Christians do not feel themselves to be priests, let alone prophets or kings. We talk about 'the priesthood of all believers', which is the participation of the baptized in the priesthood of Christ, but this seems rather vacuous, given that most lay people are rather passive in the life of the Church. Why is there such an apparent gap between what we celebrate in baptism and the life of the Church, which is often alarmingly clerical?*²

Baptism is a gift from God offered to everyone, making everyone equal before God. What should prevail in every Christian community is unity in diversity. In the community of the baptized are different ways of expressing one's faith and serving. To be more specific, in a missionary synodal Church, we all walk together, sharing and living our baptism, exercising the various functions and ministries in equal dignity.

However, there may be times when a gap exists between the ideal and the reality of the community of the baptized. Unfortunately, there are signs that the equality we are supposed to share as baptized is ignored or undermined due to clericalism, power struggle, domination, as well as ideological, cultural, and social divisions. According to Cardinal Radcliffe:

Being priest, prophet and king all flow from being alive in God. We are alive, rather than just ticking over, because we are able to mediate God's love for humanity, and humanity's love for God. That is the fundamental way in which the baptized share in Christ's priesthood. We are prophets in so far as it is given to us to speak words that give life and truth. God's own word. To be a mature human being also means that we bear responsibility in the life of society and the Church. Sharing Christ's kingship, we are all

² Timothy Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 185-186.



called to exercise our proper role in the community.¹

Other prophets in the New Testament could be mentioned here, but considering the time allotted, I will limit myself to these reflections on John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. Now, to conclude this section, I would like to highlight five points about prophecy in the New Testament.

First, John the Baptist is an example par excellence of how Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church should be lived. He is a prophet who journeyed with his followers, bringing them to Jesus. Once he encountered Jesus, he and his followers became pilgrims who walked in His presence, proclaiming and witnessing Him.

Second, without diminishing the importance of the great prophets of Biblical tradition, Jesus laid the foundation on how we should live the prophetic vocation we receive through the Sacrament of Baptism. Once Baptized, we are commissioned and sent to proclaim the Good News.

Third, the beatitudes narrated in Matthew 5 demonstrate to whom we must go. It requires attention and preference for those who suffer. Prophesying, therefore, requires that we consider the forgotten, abandoned, oppressed, and persecuted ones. In a Missionary Synodal Church, indifference to the poor and alienation from the social realities around us have no place.

Fourth, the kerygma occurs within the context of the early Christian communities. Forming community is essential for a prophetic missionary synodal church. There was a great effort by the early Christians not only to proclaim the Risen Christ but also to form communities of faith around Him.

Fifth, the Kingdom of God was inaugurated by Jesus, yet it seems far from happening in its fullness. Every effort is needed to build this kingdom where everyone will have life and life in abundance.

3. Some aspects of the Magisterium to understand Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church

3.1. Vatican II

In his work, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*, Richard P. McBrnen states that "[t]he two major sources of the conciliar ecclesiology are the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*), and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), both of which can be described as the twin pillars on which the entire conciliar ecclesiology rests."⁴

Lumen Gentium has influenced the contemporary understanding of mission. It deals with the Church's missionary activity of bringing the Good News to the ends of the earth (LG 17). The Church is seen as the universal sacrament of salvation (LG 48) which is at the service of the Kingdom of God. The mission entrusted to the Church is to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom (LG 5). Another important element is the stress on the local churches. These understanding questions the principle of merely implanting the "western" model of church in the "missions or mission territories." It recognizes their autonomy and enhances the identity of each local church. It is the variety of local churches that contributes to the catholicity of the undivided Church (AG 23). This has concrete implications for the missionaries. They are commissioned to serve the local church in dialogue with the local ordinary who has the primary responsibility of mission in his own diocese.

There is a greater openness for and recognition of the peculiarities of every local church which promotes the idea of reciprocity and exchange of experiences between them.

In *Lumen Gentium*, "[t]he church is not presenting itself imperiously and proudly but humbly; it does not define itself in legal categories or as an elite of exalted souls, but as a servant community.

¹ Ratzliff, 149-150.

⁴ Richard P. McBrnen, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2008), 164.



LG's ecclesiology is missionary through and through."⁷

Gaudium et Spes departs from the Church's hostility towards dialogue with the modern world. The Church points out the importance of dialoguing with the world and being enriched by the benefits of modern sciences. The Church realizes that she can no longer remain complacent about the problems of humanity. She should face them and dialogue with the world. The opening of this pastoral constitution already presents the main features of this document. "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the

indifference to what afflicts the people of our times. The signs of the times impel the Church to evaluate her missionary approach in the light of the gospels. Furthermore, in doing mission, we have to be aware that the Church is not tied to or bound by any culture or nation. Rather, in fidelity to the Gospel, she must transcend all kinds of nationalism or indifference to any culture (See GS 42).

LG and GS have changed the self-understanding of the Church, and consequently, the theology of mission. The fact that the Church is seen as a sign of the universal sacrament of salvation reminds us constantly that the missionary mandate is not bounded by space or time, but rather, it transcends all boundaries. All Christ's faithful are sent to the whole human race,



followers of Christ as well" (GS 1).

In line with *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* sees the Church as being at the service of the Kingdom of God. In her missionary endeavors, the Church has to be attentive to the signs of the times.⁸ There is no room for complacency and

affirming, therefore, the universal character of the Church. A Church that is a pilgrim and is constantly at the service of the Kingdom of God must therefore engage in authentic dialogue with other religions, must incarnate itself in every local culture creating therefore authentic and independent communities, and, as people of God, sees the laity not as merely passive members, but directly responsible for the expansion of the Kingdom of God in the world.

⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 372.

⁸ Joas Cocchini, "The Signs of the Times," *Covenant & Company* 4 (2005): 73. "The general intention behind the Council's use of the term 'signs of the times' leaves no room for any possibility of doubt. The Council wished to acknowledge that history existed, that the Church was in history, that the times of Christendom had now gone, and that the Church should open itself to the modern world."

3.2. The mission Documents in the Post-Vatican II Era

After having discussed Vatican II's mission theology and its impact on a Missionary Synodal Church, I will now deal with two post-



Vatican II documents on mission, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*, in order to see what they can contribute to the understanding of mission *ad extra*.

In 1975, Pope Paul VI issued the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. This document was issued in the aftermath of decolonization, when Third World peoples were claiming their freedom and asserting their identity. This context influenced the Church's understanding of mission which could no longer be an exclusive endeavor of foreign missionaries, but rather, the primary task of the local churches and of every baptized Christian. In this sense, the document was prophetic and very relevant to the mission of the Church.

Evangelii Nuntiandi was issued during a time when liberation theology had a strong influence in Latin America. Theologians, Church leaders and basic ecclesial communities began to understand mission as the effort to liberate people from all kinds of oppression caused by social injustices. They read the Scripture and related it to their life experiences. They also dialogued with social sciences in order to comprehend the causes of the social problems. For Boff, evangelization "is based on the gospel rather than on the pure and simple propagation of church doctrine. The people read the gospel together, in communities, interpreting it in an atmosphere of prayer and communion, and living it by applying it to the problems of the popular culture. It is here that the gospel appears as the good news of liberation."⁷

Evangelii Nuntiandi aimed at revitalizing the missionary fervor which seemed to be waning in the 1970s. The document presents a new understanding and ways of doing mission which are important for those who venture to cross cultural and national boundaries. In the years after *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, missionaries began to link more systematically the issues of inculturation and social development to missionary activity.

The Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II issued in 1991 marks the 25th anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, and the 15th anniversary of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. One of the main concerns of this encyclical is the decline of the missionary spirit of the universal Church.⁸ Signs of this decline are the decrease in vocations especially in first world countries but also in the third world. The fact that the Church has been well established in practically every corner of the world has created an environment of indifference towards the missionary mandate of going to the nations proclaiming the Gospel. *Redemptoris Missio* 33 distinguishes three situations wherein the missionary activity of the Church is to be carried out:

First, there is the situation which the Church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission ad gentes in the proper sense of the term. Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care. Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization."

Another issue tackled by *Redemptoris Missio* is re-evangelization or new evangelization. *RM* 30 says that "[t]oday the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have

⁷ Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelism: Good News to the Poor*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 116.

⁸ J. Neuner, "Mission in *Ad Gentes* and in *Redemptoris Missio*," *Papagloss* 56, 5 (May 1992): 230.

already heard Christ proclaimed." RM 37 deals with the re-evangelization of those people who have lost the sense of faith.

While acknowledging that statements about the missionary responsibility of the Church are not credible unless they are backed up by a serious commitment to a new evangelization in the traditionally Christian countries, it does not seem justified to regard as identical the situation of a people which has never known Jesus Christ and that of a people which has known him, accepted him and then rejected him, while continuing to live in a culture which in large part has absorbed gospel principles and values. There are two basically different situations with regard to the faith.

The commitment to a new evangelization in the traditionally Christian countries requires concrete measures. RM 39 stresses that "a new evangelization ought to create among the wealthy a realization that the time has arrived for them to become true brothers and sisters of the poor through the conversion of all to an 'integral development' open to the Absolute."

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, on the proclamation of the Gospel in the modern world, was promulgated on November 24, 2013, in the first year of Francis' pontificate. It is interconnected with the reflections arising from the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome from October 7 to 28, 2012, convened during the pontificate of Benedict XVI, and had as its theme "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith". Pope Francis revisits the Synod by recalling that the new evangelization is carried out in three areas: in the ordinary pastoral work for those baptized who practice the faith, for those baptized who do not live the demands of baptism, and for those who do not yet know Jesus (EG n. 14). Throughout the document, the Church's missionary action is emphasized (EG, n. 15) and that it should not be focused only on itself, self-referential, seeking only self-preservation, but outside itself, going outward (EG, n. 27).

One of the questions to be asked about *Evangelii Gaudium* is the attention given to the

poor. Few Church documents emphatically and prophetically portray the issue of the poor in a direct and thought-provoking manner. The poor is mentioned 87 times in the document. This factor becomes an indicator of the privileged place of the poor in *Evangelii Gaudium*. This is not a document that exclusively addresses the issue of people with low incomes, but it suggests a fact that warrants more careful consideration. In this sense, what motivated Pope Francis to address the issue of the poor in such a comprehensive manner?

When thinking about a Church that goes forth, Francis considers the countless scenarios that require the evangelizing presence of the Church and that "each Christian and each community must discern what path the Lord is asking of them, but we are all invited to accept this call: to leave our comfort zone and have the courage to reach all the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel" (EG n. 20). A missionary Church that goes forth has an address, a focus, a goal of where it wants to reach or to whom it intends to address its message. For Francis, the poor are the privileged recipients of this missionary Church that goes forth (EG, n. 48).

Few Church documents emphatically portray the issue of the poor in a direct manner as *Evangelii Gaudium* does. Pope Francis prophetically challenges the entire Church to reassess its stance on missionary action and warns about the risk of indifference towards the poor. Right at the beginning of the document, he draws attention to the individualistic tendency and indifference that modern human beings have demonstrated, especially towards the poor. "Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades." (EG n. 2).

Relativism and indifference towards the suffering of the poor are present in the lives of believers and non-believers alike. This is a reality in contemporary society in which "practical relativism consists of acting as if God did not exist, deciding as if the poor did not exist, dreaming as if others did not exist,



working as if those who have not received the message did not exist" (EG, n. 48). To solve this great individual and social sin, it is necessary to "making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor" (EG, n. 97).

It is clear that, in demonstrating his preference for the poor, Pope Francis does not begin with only theological concepts but rather with his own pastoral experience. Imbued with a deep feeling of solidarity, he recounts his experiences with people experiencing poverty, saying, "I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to" (EG, n. 7).

Paul Suess, his dictionary of *Evangelii Gaudium*, states that from this document, we discover "an indissoluble bond between the Christian faith and the poor." The traces of God's predilection for the poor demonstrated throughout the history of salvation are so evident that we can conclude that "God is with the poor, and the poor are with God." According to Suess, recognizing this closeness of God to the poor becomes a path to salvation. For him, "association with the poor corresponds to the surest path to salvation. Therefore, our task is to make the interests of the poor our interests." Pope Francis did challenge us to courageously and prophetically renew our desire for a poor Church for the poor, recognizing that the poor are not only evangelized by the Church but also evangelizers of the Church (EG, n. 19). Here then is a general idea of how *Evangelii Gaudium* can help us live the profession in a synodal missionary church, a church in which the poor have a voice and a place.

4. Living our prophetic vocation in today's world

4.1. On the brink of post-modernity

Post-modernity has strongly affected society and religion. Postmodern people are very much concerned with their individual interests and economic security. The postmodern mentality hinders people to make lifelong commitments and find meaning in self-denial and sacrifice. This context presents serious challenges for prophesying in a synodal missionary church.

The first characteristic of post-modernity is to overemphasize scientific advancements regardless of ethical principles. This attitude is very visible in the development of new weaponry, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.⁸ Another characteristic of post-modernity is globalization, which on the one hand creates bridges between nations, but on the other hand, overlooks cultural differences and favors the imposition of the culture of the powerful nations on the poorer ones. It creates a form of 'neo-colonialism' that leads people to a loss of identity and/or fragmentation of their culture and national freedom.⁹

Pope Benedict XVI, in SS 30, analyzes post-modernity by contrasting the kingdom of men which is a product of post-modernity and the Kingdom of God which is what Christians should be promoting.

(O)ur contemporary age has developed the hope of creating a perfect world that, thanks to scientific knowledge and to scientifically based politics, seemed to be achievable. Thus, Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been displaced by hope in the kingdom of man, the hope of a better world which would be the real "Kingdom of God". This seemed at last to be the great and realistic hope that man needs. It was capable of galvanizing - for a time - all man's energies. The great objective seemed worthy of full commitment. In the course of time, however, it has become clear that this hope is constantly receding. Above all it has become apparent that this may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me.

Post-modernity has also given rise to the phenomenon of secularism neglecting the value of religion and undermining its public influence by making it a private reality or simply abandoning it. Religious practices are still part of people's lives in post-modernity, but they are

⁸ See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Contexts in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Quaker City: Claretian Publications, 2004), 373-377, and David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 363.

⁹ See Michel Amaladoss, "Challenges of Mission in the 21st Century," *Theology Digest* 41, 1 (Spring 2000): 16-17.

much less communitarian. It has led people to focus more on their individual salvation. The traditional religions, with all their rigidity and unchangeable rites, are being replaced by neo-Pentecostal practices and new age movements, the danger of which is the tendency towards fundamentalism and indifference to other religions.¹¹

For Peter Phan, the question to be asked in dealing with post-modernity is "whether missionaries *ad gentes* can still proclaim the Christian faith effectively and faithfully amid the pluralistic view, widespread in popular culture and in academia, that the Christian faith is but one among many equally legitimate paths to God."¹²

Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church counteracts the problems brought by secularism and post-modernity by taking into consideration a new perspective that will lead people to think globally, not locally; to be counter-cultural, not passive; to be prophetic, not complacent; to be frugal, not consumerist; to engage in dialogue, not in proselytism. Despite all the challenges post-modernity poses everyone, the Church stands prophetically in today's world.

4.2. The Prophets of our time

We have learned that prophets are not only the ones whose names appear in the Holy Scriptures. We have also learned that through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are all called to be prophets. Throughout the centuries, the Church has been blessed with countless men and women who were true prophets, leaving us a great legacy of witness of the love for God and humanity. Many had shed their blood and had their names recorded in the list of martyrs of the Church. Many others prophesied quietly through their gestures and actions. I will mention in this session some of the great men and women of our time who have marked history as faithful saints and authentic prophets.

Sister Dorothy Mae Stang, SNDdeN (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur community) - (June 7, 1931 – February 12, 2005) was an American-born Brazilian Catholic nun and martyr. She was murdered in Anapu, Pará, in the Amazon Basin in 2005. Stang had been outspoken in her efforts on behalf of the poor and the environment and had previously received death threats from loggers and landowners.

Rosario Angelo Livatino (October 3, 1952 – September 21, 1990) was an Italian judge who was murdered by the *Shóda*, a Sicilian Mafia-type criminal organization, and Beatified by the Catholic Church. During his career, Livatino worked against corruption, and won several cases, obtaining seizure of large sums of money and property, and the arrests of senior organized crime figures. On 21 September 1990, Livatino was murdered along route SS 640 as he drove to court without bodyguards. The four assassins had been paid by the *Stiddo di Agrigento*.

Beatified last June 15, 2025, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, **Floribert Bwana Chui Ilm Kositi**, a young Congolese member of the Community of Saint Egidio is martyr of the Church. He was born on June 13, 1981, in Goma, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. He studied law and initially worked at the *Office Congolais de Contrôle* in Kinshasa, a government agency responsible for quality control of goods from other countries. After a period of training in the capital, Floribert returned to Goma, his hometown. Despite his relatively young age, Floribert made a profound impact at the customs office of Goma. Unlike his predecessors, he refused to accept bribes to pass rotten or contaminated foodstuffs. His integrity ultimately cost him his life, as he was tortured and murdered on July 7, 2007, for his refusal to succumb to corruption.

Ft. Fausto Tentorio was born on January 7, 1932, in Santa Maria di Rovagnate and raised in Santa Maria Hoe', in the Northern Italian town of Lecco. He was ordained in 1977 and left for the Philippines the following year. He was a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME). On 17 October 2011 he was shot and killed by a gunman inside his parish compound in the town of Arakan, North

¹¹ Marcelle Azevedo, "Modernity Challenges to Inculturated Evangelization," *Ecumenic Studies* 7 (September 1991): 44.

¹² Phan, Peter C. In *Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003, 135.

Cotabato, in Mindanao in the Philippines. A local paramilitary group, Bagani ('tribal warriors'), reportedly under military control of the 57th Infantry Battalion, is allegedly responsible for the killing of Father Fausto. He was the Director of the Diocesan Program for Indigenous People and a very active member of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines.

The late Pope Francis teaches us what I will call a "prophetic gesture" by kneeling and kissing the shoes of the President of South Sudan and his rivals during one of his apostolic visits on April 11, 2019. He begged the political leaders to end the country's civil war.

These five individuals are great prophets of recent times. They were people filled and

Stephen Bevans highlights the importance of dialogue and relationships in mission. He says that "mission as dialogue is ultimately about ministering out of real relationships, about making friends." Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, said, "... we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (1 Thes 2:6-8). In an era deeply marked by individualism and indifference, journeying together as community and working for a synodal church is a prophetic act.

The Final Document of the Synod affirms that "practiced with humility, the synodal style enables the Church to be a prophetic voice in today's world" (Final Document, n. 47). Further, the document asserts that "authentic practices of



moved by the Holy Spirit to witness prophetically the Gospel of Jesus. People like them make prophecy in a synodal missionary church a reality. Undoubtedly, many other people go unnoticed by the spotlight of cameras and social media, yet they truly live their prophetic vocation.

4.3. Embracing Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church

Pope Leo XIV, in his inaugural speech on the balcony of Saint Peter Basilica, said, "I am a son of Saint Augustine, an Augustinian, who said: 'With you, I am a Christian and for you a bishop.' In this sense, the Augustinian Pope reveals his motivation to be one with the people of God and to promote a synodal Church.

synodality enable Christians to be a critical and prophetic voice over against the prevailing culture" (Final Document, n. 47).

Furthermore, the Final Document gives attention to the different forms of consecrated life and highlights its prophetic mission in the world. The Synod calls "congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes, as well as associations, movements and new communities; all have a special contribution to make to the growth of synodality in the Church" (Final Document, n. 47). Still about consecrated life, the document reminds the role of intercultural communities to be witnesses of fraternity and communion.

Prophecy in the missionary synodal church does not neglect the digital universe of the internet and social networks. The prophecy that we are called to witness also reaches social networks. Missionaries should not be afraid to venture into the world of social networks. The great challenge is how to enter this universe playing a critical and prophetic role, that is, to make good use of these resources to promote life and freedom of each person. I believe that missionaries must train themselves to make proper use of the world of the internet so that this "digital environment becomes a prophetic space for mission and proclamation" (Final Document, n. 117).

After having a Pope so concerned with ecological issues and the future of our common home, the theme of ecology could not have been left out of the synodal reflections. This theme was widely discussed with Pope Francis, and it will continue to be, I believe, with Pope Leo XIV. The ecological question has become a moral responsibility of the Church and can no longer be overlooked in its mission. "Synodality and integral ecology both take on the character of relationality and insist upon us nurturing what binds us together; this is why they correspond to and complement each other concerning how the mission of the Church is lived out in today's world" (Final Document, n. 117). Furthermore, the document states that "integral ecology is part of the evangelizing mission that the Church is called to live and incarnate in history" (Final Document, n. 151).

After briefly reviewing the Synod's Final Document and highlighting some points I consider relevant to the topic I am addressing, I now proceed to my conclusions.

3. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this morning's reflection, I would like to highlight some points that I consider both as challenges and opportunities for missionary religious life in relation to the call to prophecy in a missionary synodal church. Far from intending to exhaust this subject, it is hoped that these final points which I will share may encourage you to continue reflecting on the topic in question, especially in the way we live our religious and missionary vocation.

A Brazilian communion song, entitled "*Se calarem a voz dos profetas*" (If the Voice of the Prophets is Silenced), came to mind while I was preparing my reflection. Prophets cannot remain silent. Prophets must speak and bear witness to truth, justice, and peace. The world needs prophets, true prophets filled with the Holy Spirit. Men and women who are not indifferent to the struggle of the poor and the oppressed. Men and women who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. The first great challenge is therefore to rekindle in ourselves and in all Christians the prophetic vocation that we received through baptism and that is confirmed throughout our lives.

We, religious missionaries, consecrated to mission through our vows of poverty, chastity and obedience have a very important task that is to make Prophecy in a Missionary Synodal Church visible. Our vocation does not grant us a superior status to other members of the baptized community, but it does require us to bear witness in our lives to what we propose to be. It is very sad when we become counter-witnesses due to infidelity, hypocrisy, clericalism, abuse of power, and indifference towards the people of God, especially the most fragile and impoverished ones. These are things that weaken the contribution we should give to prophecy and hinder the synodal journey of the Church.

The great prophets of the Old and New Testaments, Jesus and his disciples, as well as the great leaders of the early Christian communities, were community builders. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they prophesied. They announced the Good News and denounced everything that was against God's plans. And they did all this in the community. They were not individualists who spoke to the wind, instead they formed communities among those they served. We need to learn to create communities among ourselves too. We live in international / intercultural communities. We come from many different nationalities and cultures. We work together to serve God's people. Without claiming perfection, we must bear witness to the universal brotherhood and sisterhood among us. With humility, we must

learn to live our unity in diversity. By doing so, we will be prophesying and contributing to the development of a synodal missionary church.

The world has become a small village. In many countries, different nationalities are living and working together. This social reality also influences the Church in the contemporary world. Christian communities are composed of people coming from different countries. In first world countries there are parishes where Latin American, Asian and African Christians are forming a community which is shepherded by native priests and/or foreigners. Prophecy in a synodal missionary church requires that everyone should have a place in the community. There should not be exclusion or segregation of people due to their nationality or culture. To be prophetic requires that Christians work for just, respectful and fraternal relations.

The Church's missionary activity cannot but have universal

proportions. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). It has been agreed by Bible scholars that this great commission stresses making disciples of all nations. Therefore, to make disciples has global and/or universal proportions.¹¹ In a prophetic synodal missionary

Church, mission has no borders. To be prophetic means to be able to cross geographical, social and cultural borders. Christians must not remain closed in on themselves, in their little ghettos, indifferent to the rest of the world.

Finally, being a prophet and prophesying is not possible unless we are firmly rooted in God and guided by profound spirituality. Prophets must be men and women of God. Men and women who pray. The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) has a phrase that is often repeated in theological circles. He said, "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist". We may disagree with the statement attributed to



him. Still, I believe, this phrase highlights the importance of cultivating a deep spirituality to live our baptism. To be a prophet is to allow God to speak to us, in us, and through us. Without a deep relationship with Him, we will be talking about our own aspirations and ideologies, but not about God's liberating message.

¹¹ See Douglas E. A. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington, "Make Disciples of all the Gentiles (Mt 28:19)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37, 3 (July 1975): 368; Johannes Nissen, "Matthew: Mission and Method," *International Review of Mission* Vol. XXX, n. 360 (2002): 77; and John P. Meier, "Nation or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, 1 (January 1977): 94-102.

Group Reports on the theme

Charism, Prophecy and Witness

Missionary Institutes and Synodality in the Context of Charism

How can structures free us for the way of the Spirit or hinder us from truly listening to the Spirit?

Structures can either enable or impede our ability to listen to the Spirit. They can free us when they foster openness and flexibility, which are essential for synodality. This involves a willingness to let go, reimagine, and change, actively seeking God's path together. Religious communities have often done this implicitly for decades, making them valuable examples of synodality. The "dance" between leadership and the participation of all in congregational life is crucial. However, structures become hindrances when they promote fear—fear of losing power, influence, or a narrow understanding of identity. When communities cling to what they have, viewing "letting go" as a loss rather than a necessary step for growth and maturation, they hinder the Spirit. Structures that confuse identity with fixed institutions, rituals, or habits also limit the flow of the Spirit. True identity is rooted in the charism as a gift from God that allows participation in Christ's mission.

What is the Spirit saying to us as a group regarding missionary institutes and synodality in the context of charism?

The Spirit is calling us to:

- **Embrace Openness and Collaboration:** We must pray for openness to the Holy Spirit, allowing us to release preconceived ideas and foster creativity in a synodal mission. This involves working together without leaving anyone behind, recognizing that "if you want to go far, go together." The Spirit urges us to move from 'I' to 'we,' not just for numerical strength but because collaboration is essential to the Trinitarian gift of charism.

- **Return to Our Roots and Interpret Charism Anew:** It's essential to reflect on our founding charism and individual charisms, interpreting them in today's context to respond meaningfully to current needs. This deepens our understanding of charism, allowing it to be expressed in new ways that align with contemporary challenges. The Divine Ruah (Spirit) challenges us to reimagine our mission, compelling us to embody the values of our founders while remaining firm in them, returning to simplicity with joy and hope.

- **Cultivate Humility and Wisdom:** We need the humility to be authentic and honest as consecrated persons, which enables us to recognize and appreciate the gifts of others. Praying for wisdom helps us to judge rightly and distinguish between good and evil, guiding us faithfully in our calling as disciples. This humility also counters clericalism and superiority, fostering a spirit of "living with" others.

- **Engage in Ongoing Formation and Conversion:** Placing Christ at the center of our spiritual and community life, evidenced by openness, collaboration, respect, and conversion, is vital. Continuous formation at all levels is needed to enhance communication skills, navigate the synodal journey, and accept one another. This also means having the courage to embark on a conversion journey to truly embody synodality. Regular evaluation spaces are also crucial.

- **Address Challenges as Opportunities:** The Spirit highlights the importance of recognizing challenges as signs of the charism's fruitfulness, leading to purification, perseverance, and hope. This involves being aware of cultural, nationalistic, and ethnic divisions, and understanding that "inter" (inter-congregational, intercultural) approaches are vital for formation and ongoing collaboration at all levels.



- **Understand Charism as a Dynamic Gift:** Charism is a personal gift from the Spirit that enriches and rejuvenates an institute over time. It must be translated into personal and institutional spirituality, validated by its ability to respond to the "cry of the people." The synodal path helps us deepen our understanding of our charisms by listening to the Spirit and each other, fostering a shared journey where we learn from and appreciate the beauty of others' charisms.

Missionary Institutes and Synodality in the Context of Prophecy

Are missionaries today sufficiently prophetic, and in what ways?

Missionaries today are actively on the synodal path, which serves as a vital opportunity to live out their prophetic missionary vocation. This means planting and sowing seeds of hope, peace, justice, and reconciliation. Being prophetic involves making God present in a concrete way for humanity, reflecting God's gaze and merciful love through both their being and actions. This often necessitates a counter-cultural attitude, promoting generative silence, accepting suffering, making non-consumerist choices, and showing deep respect for every human being and all creation.

Prophecy, in the complex and wounded world of today, is not about providing simplistic answers. Instead, it's about asking open questions that lead to a continuous search for God's call in diverse contexts. A prophet is someone who sees reality and interprets it through God's eyes, being deeply in tune with God's *pathos* and, consequently, with the pain of the people. This mystical connection to God's suffering fuels prophetic action.

While there's still much growth needed, there's a clear germ of prophetic spirit evident in the eschatological tension of "already, but not yet"—action is now, but the gaze is set on a broader horizon. The Final Document of the Synod affirms the prophetic role of Consecrated Life, noting that many communities serve as "laboratories of interculturality, discernment, and harmony." This positive affirmation encourages us to recognize the Spirit's life and action within our congregations.

By virtue of their baptism and call, missionaries are inherently prophets. This prophetic identity is actively lived out by:

- **Empowering the marginalized:** Missionaries act as a voice for the voiceless, working to empower women, youth, and men who are on the peripheries.
- **Moving beyond comfort zones:** This requires missionaries to be with those in the periphery and build communities that evolve to meet contemporary needs, thus becoming more authentic and relevant.
- **Listening to the prophetic voice of Jesus:** Finding the echoes of His voice in every person and context, and leveraging their power to effect change while embracing the power of vulnerability.
- **Avoiding institutional preoccupation:** Recognizing the risk of becoming too focused on institutional maintenance, which can hinder their prophetic potential. Instead, they are called to live simply and interculturally, opening their eyes to the suffering of others and moving forward with purpose.
- **Responding creatively to prophetic needs:** This includes engaging in social justice, interfaith dialogue, and environmental stewardship.

Missionary Institutes and Synodality in the Context of Witness

How can we be witnesses to synodality as missionaries in the Church and in the world?

To be an effective witness to synodality, missionaries must cultivate specific attitudes and practices:

- **Personal Conversion to Synodality:** It begins with a personal conversion to "being" synodality in all aspects of life. This means seeing others with "God's eyes" and listening deeply with humility to discern the Spirit's voice speaking through them.
- **Embracing a Collaborative and Reciprocal Spirit:** Walking together in the spirit of synodality demands openness to collaboration and reciprocity in sharing gifts to empower each other for the mission. This



translates into pastoral interaction, communal discernment in decision-making, and meaningful encounters, ensuring everyone is involved:

- **Living an Authentic Charismatic Identity:** Missionaries must live authentically the gift they've received, which calls them individually and communally to conversion and holiness. They must truly embody their charismatic identity, inherited from their founders, in today's world. This collective dimension is beautifully illustrated by the images of candles sharing light in the darkness (where each candle contributes to a collective glow) and wheat seeds growing together in a field (each seed dies to bear fruit, but needs the support of others to mature). These images highlight the **TOGETHER, SYNODAL** discernment, rather than an individualistic one, emphasizing that while each "candle must burn" and "seed must die" (individual commitment), growth and fruitfulness depend on collective support.

• **Creating Structured Communal Paths:** We must work in a structured way with communities, congregations, employees, colleagues, and ecclesial groups towards synodality. This emphasizes the importance of mutuality in relationships, valuing differences and the unique gifts of all. It involves building bridges and being intentionally inclusive, fostering participation and communion to walk together in mission.

- **Embracing a Continuous Journey:** Recognizing that the synodal journey is never complete, it's a lifelong spiritual process that demands ongoing openness to the Spirit's movement and a willingness to discern where God is calling to respond to contemporary needs.

- **Cultivating Humility and Reciprocity:** Foster an attitude of humility, being open to learning from others—whether they are community members, collaborators, or the people who welcome us. This involves

valuing everyone, healing wounded relationships, and living out reciprocity, trust, honesty, and continuous discernment. Initial formation should specifically aim to develop candidates' openness, authenticity, and ability to live in reciprocal relationships.

- **Living Authentically and Prophetically:** Witnessing synodality requires missionaries to be true to their charism and spirituality, living their vocation authentically and prophetically. This means making synodality "our way of life," discerning and walking together in the spirit of synodality.
- **Moving Beyond Comfort Zones to the Peripheries:** A crucial aspect of being a synodal witness is the willingness to leave comfort zones and go out to the peripheries, where needs are often greatest.
- **Committing to Ongoing Conversion and Formation for Communion:** Witnessing



synodality is an ongoing process of conversion that brings us closer to the Spirit. From this spiritual foundation, we develop a spirituality of hospitality, openness, and communion, fostering growth in listening, discerning, and participating together. Continuous formation for communion is essential to strengthen our unity in Christ and enable us to be true witnesses.

Embodying Inclusion and Creating Together: A synodal way of being calls for attitudes of inclusion, reciprocity, mutual listening, respect, and enrichment. Committing to these attitudes impels us to bear fruit in concrete actions where we create together. This very act of togetherness—for instance, through networking—is a powerful witness in itself.

Evaluation of the Seminar

1. Ideas Taken from the Seminar

The seminar provided a profound and practical understanding of synodality as an ongoing process requiring continuous conversion and transformation in mentality for individuals, religious institutes, and the wider Church. Key ideas emphasized included:

- **Synodality as a Holistic Process:** It encompasses multiculturalism, multiculturalism, multinationality, and all aspects of human interaction, stressing the importance of walking together and the mutual sharing of gifts.
- **"Conversation in the Spirit":** This methodology was highlighted as an excellent and inclusive approach that fosters deep listening, attentiveness, and ensures every contribution is heard, serving as a powerful antidote to dominant attitudes.
- **Charism as a Shared Gift:** The understanding that charism is a collective gift for a greater purpose, not the sole possession of one person. Participants affirmed that our charisms can be shared at five levels and that it's vital for members of the same charismatic family to work together, as we can no longer work in isolation—it is "missio Dei."
- **The Call to Prophetic Witness:** Participants grasped the imperative to be authentic, humble prophetic witnesses, constantly listening to God's voice and speaking out against injustice. The seminar reinforced the idea that living one's evangelical vows faithfully is a prophetic witness to the world, and that religious people must uphold this dimension of their life and become a voice for the voiceless.
- **Shift from "I" to "We":** A fundamental change in mindset, emphasizing "being" over "doing" and fostering a collective identity.
- **Importance of Networking and Collaboration:** The recognition of the need

for greater collaboration among different institutes and with lay people to enhance effectiveness and visibility in mission. One participant specifically noted the importance of being open to the laity, humbly sharing with them, and letting oneself be inspired by them.

- **Focus on the Periphery:** A renewed commitment to reaching out to marginalized communities and being a voice for the voiceless.
- **Centrality of Prayer and Discernment:** These were underscored as essential elements for all missionary endeavor.
- **Re-imagining Mission:** Inspiration to creatively rethink mission through daily experiences and reflection.
- **Reciprocity and Diversity:** The value of embracing diversity and fostering reciprocity beyond mere complementarity.
- **Initial Formation:** The significance of early formation in cultivating openness and acceptance of others.
- **Inclusion of All Baptized:** The concept that the Synodal Path embraces all the baptized, acknowledging their gifts for a missionary synodal Church.
- **Authentic Charism's Ripple Effect:** The idea that if Christ lives within us, our authentic charism extends to various spheres of encounter (charismatic family, inter-congregational, ecclesial vocations, world periphery).
- **Challenge of Accompaniment:** The call to walk alongside those who might challenge our security, especially concerning Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and inclusion.
- **Continuous Conversion:** The understanding that personal and communal conversion is an unending journey.
- **Humility in Evangelization:** The insight that even the poor and unlearned can evangelize, emphasizing humility.

- **Personal Voice:** One participant learned that their opinion counts and that they should always make their voice heard while also listening to others without judging them.

2. Valuable Insights for Ministry

Participants found numerous practical and transformative insights directly applicable to their ministries and daily lives:

- **Enhanced Listening and Discernment Skills:** The seminar, particularly through the "conversation in the spirit" methodology, significantly improved participants' abilities in communal listening and discernment, proving invaluable for decision-making and fostering synodality.
- **Inclusive Mission Approach:** A strong reinforcement of the need to be more inclusive in mission, acknowledging and valuing the diverse gifts within individuals, communities, and congregations. This includes actively involving the lay family and cultivating "cultural intelligence" to navigate diverse cultural influences. One participant specifically noted the need to work collaboratively with lay people in their institutions.
- **Strengthened Collaboration and Networking:** The seminar reinforced the critical need to strengthen networking and collaborate with other congregations and lay people for greater impact, visibility, and effectiveness in mission, especially in addressing contemporary challenges and promoting vocations. One participant noted the need to work with NGOs that fight injustice and promote human dignity.
- **Reaffirmed Charism and Identity:** The discussions served as timely reminders of the foundational identity and purpose of religious life, emphasizing that charism is a gift for a broader purpose and that authentically living one's charism contributes significantly to the proclamation of the Gospel.
- **Practical Unity and Witness:** The seminar underscored that synodality is about fostering practical unity, not just theoretical concepts,

which enables a stronger and more credible witness in the face of Church challenges. Collaborative work, particularly where vocations are flourishing or lacking, is key to proclaiming the Kingdom.

- **Holistic Formation and Spirituality:** Insights highlighted the necessity of initial and ongoing formation programs that cultivate synodality, humility, and a Christ-centered spirituality of hospitality, fostering openness and welcome rather than indifference or hostility.
- **Emphasis on "Being" over "Doing":** The seminar's focus on inner transformation and openness to the Spirit, shifting the emphasis from excessive activity to a deeper spiritual presence.
- **Advocacy for the Voiceless:** A clear and compelling call to be a voice for the voiceless and actively address injustice.
- **Inspiration for Mission Re-imagining:** Cardinal Tagle's presentation, using vivid images and stories, inspired participants to re-imagine their mission by drawing on their own daily experiences.
- **Impact on Youth Ministry:** For those involved in youth ministry, the seminar offered valuable insights on making ministry more effective through authentic religious life, cultural intelligence, and respecting the gifts of others, particularly the poor. It also highlighted how active participation and authentic synodality can counteract the individualistic tendencies of the younger generation.

3. Suggestions for Improvement of the Seminar

While feedback on the seminar's organization, content, and methodology was overwhelmingly positive, several constructive suggestions were offered for future improvements:

- **Managing Listening Load:** Participants suggested finding ways to prevent "overload of listening" from extensive reflections, reports, and talks throughout the day, particularly during homilies. One suggestion was to allow for more moments of silence



- **Time Allocation:**
 - Allocate more time for panel discussions, as current durations felt too short.
 - Increase time for personal reflection and integration of content.
 - Allow a little more time between breakfast and the first session to avoid rushing.
 - Consider including a half-day excursion to provide a break and unwind from the seminar's intensity.
 - One participant suggested that more time should be allocated for the morning faith-sharing sessions.
- **Speaker Diversity:** Introduce resource persons without "expert" credentials, such as ordinary men and women from the Church and society who can share their lived experiences of synodality.

Logistics and Communication:

- Provide clearer information on the locations of various events (e.g., cultural evening).
- Make presentations and texts available beforehand, especially for participants working in a non-native language, to aid note-taking and comprehension.
- Improve room orientation for new attendees, possibly with staff assisting upon arrival in larger facilities.
- Allocate more time for concluding talks before the Eucharist to allow for a more thorough synthesis.
- Address practical issues such as coffee machine availability.
- Provide a general "room orientation" for new attendees, including practical information like not touching specific alarm strings in bathrooms.
- **Environmental Considerations:** Strongly encourage the reduction of single-use plastics (especially for water) by promoting reusable tumblers and using glass, aligning with IPIC principles.
- **Group Re-grouping:** Re-group participants at least once during the seminar to facilitate a wider range of discussions and

perspectives.

- **Opening Prayer Creativity:** Explore more creative approaches for the opening prayer. One participant suggested celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours as one big family in the next seminar.
- **Participant Introductions:** Implement a small presentation (name, congregation, country) on the first evening to help participants connect and get to know each other.
- **Digital World Exploration:** Consider exploring the digital world as a missionary continent and discussing adapted approaches for this space.
- **Feedback Session Length and Speaker:** Suggest that the person giving plenary feedback be specific and concise, not exceeding 15 minutes. It was also suggested that this role could be filled by a woman in future seminars.
- **Timing of the Seminar:** Consider holding the seminar in mid-July, as this period might align with holidays for some working individuals.
- **Social Outing:** One participant proposed a general outing for the whole group, such as to a lake or another nice site.

Overall, participants expressed immense gratitude for the meticulous preparation, organizational efficiency, and unwavering support provided, acknowledging that the seminar effectively demonstrated synodality through its very execution.



Charism, Prophecy and Witness in a Synodal Journey



During the 5 days that we were together, we were walking humbly with God, with God who sent us his Holy Spirit as our real and only guide, and through and with

God we were walking with each other. We found and received inspiration for it through our daily *Lectio Divina*, in our prayer, where we opened our heart for the voice of the Holy Spirit, the voice that we also could hear in listening attentively to each other. We can now ask ourselves now: are we ready to continue this way of walking together, this way of synodality, also after these 5 days, and continue our walk with our brothers and sisters in our communities, with the men and women with whom we are collaborating, with our brothers and sisters we are serving, with other groups in the Church and with the whole people of God? Or do we prefer to close ourselves, to walk alone and find ourselves self-sufficient, to build again walls and focus on our hierarchical structures, where the one is higher and the other lower, where our clerical mentality creates only distances. Indeed, we maintain free to choose how to walk: alone or with others, but we have to ask ourselves if we are in fact really fully free to do that, when we see and experience ourselves as real brothers and sisters of each other and believe that this is God's real nature

that is planted in our hearts. Or to mention here the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas: it is the face of the other that put us towards an ethical imperative: our being a person in relation with other prevails our absolute freedom. We can never ignore the fact that we are all brothers and sisters, with responsibility for each other, and it is in the face of the one we meet that we hear the call to be respected, to be helped, to be loved. Closing us for that is ignoring our real identity as a human being. It is repeating what Cain was saying on the request of God where his brother Abel was: "I am not responsible for my brother, I am not my brother's keeper".

Walking together is developing real hospitality to the other, where the door is open to receive the other and through which we can leave our comfort zones in order to go to the other, where the table is ready to serve the food and the drinks and where we are ready to dance and sing with each other, like we did with joy the night before. For Henry Nouwen hospitality was all about that: to create a free space where the other could be himself of herself, where the other is appreciated for his or her presence, where the other can sing his or her own song, feel free to stay or to leave and to greet each other in their own language, like we also did the night before.

Today, in our walking together, we speak a lot about interculturality. Is that something new and were the first missionaries who proceeded us not open for the culture of the other, yes, the very strange culture in which they arrived? They were learning the language, they were listening to their stories, they were singing together their songs and dancing their dances. But perhaps it was not always with a full mentality of equality, and even today, this feeling of superiority and inferiority didn't totally disappear, also between the different tribes and ethnical



groups who are forming community. I read in our own history how difficult the first local brothers had to live in harmony with the missionaries coming from the North who were before their teachers they appreciated but who had now difficulties to see their former students as real brothers, and how difficult it was and still can be to live peacefully and in harmony with those from another ethnical background. Interculturality maintains a challenge, especially in our time where our communities are becoming more and more international, and where the only common culture that can overcome all differences is: the culture of the Gospel. In discussions about our different cultures, our different backgrounds, our different customs and lifestyles, and its tensions that can bring in our communities, the question

discern with each other, where we gradually develop real reciprocity towards each other. These are basic attitudes that cannot only be taught in a theoretical way, but have to be learned through experience, by living it. Can we dream of our communities, our congregations and societies where openness towards each other may grow, where mutual trust and honesty are present and where those who are wounded can find consolation and real healing. We were happy to learn during these days that many of us have good experiences in this living together with different cultures and developed, to use the word that was given by Cardinal Tagle, a kind of cultural intelligence. We are really thankful for their witnesses about it.

At the basis of our lives, at the basis of our religious communities, is the Holy Spirit present with his charisma, and every one of us received his own specific charisma and found also his or her home in the charisma that was given by the Holy Spirit to the religious group that he or she joined. Let us be thankful and joyful living our charisms as a real gift to the world



must always be: is this expression of culture in line or is opposite with the values of the Gospel, are we expressing our real and pure Christian faith through and with this behaviour or is it in opposite with it or is it only an emotional reaction that we develop, that finds its origin in our feeling of superiority?

Interculturality will always maintain a learning process, and therefore it is so healthy that already in the early stages of formation, we all learn how to live in harmony with each other and that we can learn how to walk humbly with God and so also humbly with each other. It is an essential point to develop if we will grow as persons and as groups in that attitude of synodality, where we learn a new culture of active listening to each other, where we learn to

and in the Church. It is like a rich field with many different flowers which give colour to our world, to our society, in our Church, and that forms a wonderful harmony. It is so important to know our charisma which is at the basis of our identity, to live our charisma as one specific part of the message of the Gospel through which we may contribute to bring the Kingdom of God in the world. That is our missionary vocation and mission, and everyone is invited, like Francis of Sales and Teresa of Lisieux with him that as different flowers we all have the flourish in our way and on our place. But perhaps we have now to add that we have to flourish together, be thankful for the many other flowers that are flourishing also in the field of our world and

with which we are forming a rich and colourful mosaic.

In our charism is something stable and at the same time dynamic. We remember the famous words from Vatican II where religious were invited to go back to their roots, to their founder and their own initial stories in order to discover again their charism, because in some cases it was somewhat forgotten, but at the same time to develop a real aggiornamento, a dynamic translating of the original charism in terms and actions for today, linked to the real needs, to the new needs, listening to the cry of God in the cries of his people. Everyone is invited to shine God's love in the world, especially in the world of those who have no experience that God is loving them, those who are marginalized, those who are living at the periphery of our existence. Every group of us will have here his specific way to give form to this vocation and mission. But we can only shine God's love in the world if God's love is present in our hearts, if our charism is a living reality in our personal lives and in the lives of our communities. We can only see, meet and love Jesus in the other, recognize Him in the face of the other, of the poor, of the sick, when we already know Him through our prayer life. Therefore, as consecrated men and women, we have always to be contemplative, if we will be really apostolic, if we will live our being a missionary to the full. We remember here Mother Teresa who answered to the question if her sisters were contemplative or apostolic with a simple "yes", explaining afterwards that nobody could be really apostolic without being contemplative. I think that is true for all of us.

But it should be a mistake to think that only we as so-called consecrated men and women received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is really urgent to become aware of the charisms living in an active way in other Christians, in men and women with whom we are working together, and therefore find new ways of collaboration, and even more than collaboration, coming to real reciprocal exchanges, walking and travelling together, ready to learn from each other, sharing our mutual charism so to enrich each other, our communities, our world and those we are serving. No gift of the Holy Spirit

is given to be kept in an anxious way for ourselves alone, but is given to be shared with many, really without limits. And these gifts are also given to us through the one we are serving, we must have the humility to let us educate by them and discover through our encounters with them new elements in our charisms. Some months ago, I was in Rwanda visiting one of our centres for children with a physical disability, where I met a small boy whose both legs were amputated and was now learning to walk with protheses. And the only word he spoke with a big smile was: "Dieu merci". Here I heard the Holy Spirit who enriched my charism of charity through these words of that small boy, who continued in his suffering and fragility to thank God. Yes, the Holy Spirit is always new, it is always Pentecost that is going on, and the Holy Spirit brings us together, let us understand each other, help us to form real communities. And so we come to the point that we are urged to walk together, with different speeds, adapting our own speed to the one of the other, so that we can really walk together, hand in hand.

It is through living our charism in a radical way and open towards the many charisms that are alive in others, that we become real prophets in the world of today. Because consecrated life is by nature prophetic, but so many times we are living beyond our mission because we are afraid to leave our comfort zones. It has to start in our own lives and in our own communities. It is there that we have to live our religious consecration and our vows with joy and shine this joy towards others. Our way of life is not an evidence in the eyes of many today, but it had to be a point of reflection about what is really important in life, in a world where people are losing their eschatological view. Our lives have to be a silent sign of God's presence in the world and the fact that the world and life in it is not closed on itself, but finds its origin and destination in God, what brings us the real joy in life. We have to keep our enthusiasm and our hope also and especially in difficult moments, also when our groups are diminishing and becoming old. To be a prophet is not only through great acts and strong words, but finds its origin in our way of life, in our way of being present in the life of others, in the way we can show the compassion of God to those who are

suffering. It is starting with developing small sign of goodness towards others, and set a block on every kind of indifference.



the system and where also we as missionaries are confronted with and can even be tempted to lose our indignation for situations

A prophet is seeing and interpreting the reality of life with and through the eyes of God. And through our presence, through our concrete love for the other, we will bring God alive and present in the world. There are today different new ways to bring God in the world and that asks creativity, courage and especially trust that God will never abandon us, that we hear his words sounding again: "Don't be afraid".

Prophecy is also about struggling against unjust structures, situations where people are discriminated, not respected in their human dignity. On this level, it is so important to work together with other groups, with other congregations, to find our place also in official organisations where we have to let hear our voice in defending the poor, the neglected, the voiceless. These groups with our active presence can really be signs of prophecy and awake politicians and governments in order to take their responsibility in the field of developing justice and peace. We all know that this can be also very delicate, even dangerous, especially in regimes where the human rights are not respected. We remember the stories of those who took serious risks, even with the danger to lose their lives. Let us not forget those modern martyrs in our religious families and let us find inspiration in their lives and in the gift of their lives for the wellbeing of others. "Nobody can have greater love than to give his life for his friends". Last Sunday we celebrated the beatification of Florentin Bwiza Chui who was killed in Goma in RDC, because he was more concerned about the health of the people than to accept corruption through which the life of people should come in danger. He is a strong example for our actual world, especially in those places where corruption became part of

where injustice is becoming the norm. Here also can be together as missionaries, with our colleagues in the field, in a synodal way be a great support in our common struggle against unjust structures, through which finally always the poor and the weak are the first victims.

Missionary Institutes and synodality: charism, prophecy and witness. We can only give a positive witness as missionaries if we are ready to put down all walls of self-sufficiency, of clericalism, of superiority, and out of a clear knowledge of our identity recognize our strengths and weaknesses, accept our limits and see the necessity of working together with others in a positive way. God is showing us through our weaknesses, through our vulnerability, which we have not to ignore or try to escape, new ways of collaboration, the importance of networking, the way that we have to give a full place to the laity in our collaborations with them in pastoral activities and in the management of our apostolic works. Not with fear, not with suspicions, but with fully recognition of our and their identity and finding in our shared charism the real source for a healthy reciprocal exchange and collaboration. Let us also here learn from each other where synodal walking together gave already many fruits.

Thank you, dear Brothers and Sisters, for your openness, for your synodal walking during these days of grace, and let us pray for the blessing of the Lord and the intercession of his divine Mother and inspired by our beloved Founders to continue our walking with courage, with great joy and that together, in a synodal way.

Statement from the SEDOS Residential Seminar “Missionary Institutes and Synodality - Charism, Prophecy, and Witness”

We, seventy missionaries, members of thirty Missionary Institutes, representing thirty-two nationalities across all continents, were lay men

and women, Religious brothers, sisters and priests, who gathered in the serene and spiritually resonant setting of Centro *Ad Genes* in Nemi, outside Rome, for the 2025 SEDOS Residential Seminar. The time we shared was a profound witness to the Church's intercultural, international and intergenerational richness and to the possibility of unity in diversity in our increasingly polarized world.

Through mutual listening, prayer, and creative engagement, marked by the joy of walking together, we searched for the paths of tomorrow's mission — rooted in the Gospel, in response to the cries of the earth and of people who are made poor.

In the face of today's global chaos — marked by war, hunger, violence, and environmental disaster — we feel a renewed urgency to serve as instruments of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. An appeal resounds among us: to intensify our prayer and take courageous action, both personally and collectively, to help

build a world where hope, dialogue, and communion are real and tangible.



With one voice, we join Pope Leo XIV in his urgent plea: “Let everything possible be done to achieve genuine, just and lasting peace as soon as possible.” We echo his call to all those in power — to use that power not to destroy, but to bring peace; not to divide, but to reconcile; not to kill, but to protect life. To put an end to all war and killing so that peace may dwell in our hearts, in our communities, and reign in our world.

As missionary men and women, we reaffirm our commitment to the shared journey of synodality — locally and universally. We pray that the Church may increasingly become a bridge of unity and healing for humanity and all of God's creation.

May our tender and loving God bless our mission and all our efforts to remain prophetic witnesses of God's merciful love, on this synodal journey.



Witnesses in a Synodal Framework



Esteemed panelists and participants,

It is an honor to be here with all of you, as member of the universal Church, to share a living testimony from India — a journey marked by communion, participation, and

mission. Inspired by the Synod on Synodality and rooted in the Gospel invitation to be “on the boat, together,” we in the Conference of Religious Women India (CRWI) are witnessing the fruits of synodality come alive through concrete initiatives and shared discernment.

The Synodal journey is not a theoretical construct; it is a lived reality that unfolds daily through the listening hearts and collaborative spirits of women religious across India. Pope Francis reminds us that synodality is not merely about meetings and structures but about being a Church that listens — to God, to one another, and to the cries of the poor and vulnerable.

Art 57 Charisms, Vocations and Ministries for Mission: I quote from the final document.

These gifts are not the exclusive property of those who receive and use them, nor are they intended solely for their personal benefit or for that of a group. They are intended for the flourishing of the life of the Christian community, including caring pastorally for vocations and the development of society.

The Conference of Religious India and Women is privileged to serve as such a space — a platform where different congregations, diverse in charism and apostolate, come together with humility and hope, forging paths of unity in diversity.

A profound expression of this synodality is the “Sisters Led Youth Initiatives” (SLYI) in the Archdiocese of Bangalore. This initiative, funded by the Hilton Foundation, is a collaborative mission involving six women’s congregations: The Apostolic Carmel, Salesian

Sisters of Don Bosco (FMA), Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes (SJT), Society of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC), and Sisters of St. Mary of the Immaculate (SMMI). While the project holder is the Apostolic Carmel, it is governed, shaped, and executed by all six congregations equally — reflecting the very essence of journeying together.

The vision of SLYI is clear: by 2025, to empower over 1200 marginalized youth in Bangalore, thereby uplifting families and strengthening communities. The approach is holistic — offering not only vocational training but also spiritual, emotional, and social empowerment. Already, nearly 500 youth have enrolled in various programs such as fashion design, electronic mechanics, accounts executive, communicative English, and more. This is not just skills training; it is formation for life. Alongside technical training, participants engage in character formation, yoga, meditation, career guidance, house visits, and job fairs — experiences that build resilience and nurture a sense of purpose.

Women religious play a pivotal role as both mentors and companions in this journey. The program’s emphasis on peer-to-peer mentoring, social entrepreneurship, and financial literacy — including initiatives like Skill Net — strengthens community bonds and creates sustainable opportunities. Especially noteworthy is the economic empowerment of women participants through access to government entitlements and banking systems. Over 200 trainees have received new identity documents and 245 have opened bank accounts, enabling access to public schemes.

But synodality, as the final document of the Synod beautifully states, is not just about horizontal collaboration — it is also about vertical communion, a shared orientation toward the Holy Spirit. At our National Assembly of the Conference of religious India (women and

ment) held in May 2024, we practiced “Conversation in the Spirit,” a method that calls for deep listening, contemplative silence, and shared discernment. Through this sacred process, we do not merely plan projects; we listen together to one another but more importantly we listened to the voices of the young and the suffering humanity. It was indeed an eye opener and a call for introspection of our life and ministry. This inward journey helped us shape responses to the needs of our time.

Art 55 (final document on Synod on Synodality) speaks of the evils that afflict our world—the abuse crisis. Out of such discernment was born our newest initiative — the “Safeguarding of Women Religious India” (SWRI) — launched in 2025 in collaboration with the Institute of Anthropology (IADC), Gregorian University, Rome. This initiative, built on our collective commitment to dignity and justice, addresses the often-overlooked vulnerabilities of women religious themselves. We have come to understand, through synodal reflection, that safeguarding is not only about protecting children and vulnerable adults but must also include those within our own Church structures who face neglect, silencing, or abuse.

SWRI offers a robust, accessible, and contextual safeguarding formation through online diplomas and general courses. These sessions, held weekly, are facilitated by experts and include both theological foundations and practical tools for building safe environments. With support from CRWI and scholarships available, participation has expanded across congregations, forming a vibrant network of sisters and collaborators committed to a culture of safeguarding.

Moreover, our safeguarding commitment extends into our policies and practices. Through workshops, webinars, and consultations, we are assisting congregations in developing institutional safeguarding policies, grievance

redressal mechanisms, and accompaniment frameworks — ensuring that every sister feels seen, heard, and protected.

These experiences echo the call of the Synod to foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility. We believe that the journey toward a truly synodal Church cannot bypass the voices and experiences of women religious. In India, where societal structures often mirror clerical or patriarchal patterns, our efforts to build a more inclusive, participatory, and safe Church are indeed counter-cultural — yet deeply evangelical.

Synodality and Participatory Bodies: There is an effort to include lay women and men and consecrated women at various forums and especially in the various commissions of the bishop's conference.



Every year the Catholic Bishop's Conference and the National Conference of religious India have a joint meeting. It is a wonderful opportunity to share and to listen to one another. It is a platform to talk, to express our story.

As we stand here today, we are aware that our boat is still navigating turbulent waters. But we are also deeply aware that we are not alone. The presence of Christ among us, especially in the faces of the poor, the young, the voiceless, sustains our journey. We are, truly, on the boat together.

In conclusion, the synodal journey of Conference of religious women India (CRWI) is a living expression of a Church that walks in communion, discerns in participation, and acts in mission. It is a Church where charisms converge, voices are heard, and the Spirit is trusted to guide us forward. Through initiatives like SLYI and SWRI, we hope not only to serve but to witness — to a Church that is more honest, more just, and more holy.

Thank you, and may the Holy Spirit continue to lead us onward.



SEIPOS Residential Seminar Nemo-- Cultural Evening



SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR 2025
At 8.30 a.m., on 23 October 2025 at UISG

Programme

Theme: *From Ad Gentes to Later Gentes – Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of 'Ad Gentes: On the Mission Activity of the Church'*

08:30 – 09:00 — Registration

— Morning Session – Moderator: **St. Oyiđu Okworl, SHCJ**

09:00 – 09:30 — Opening prayer by St. Nirmala F. Gnanapragasam, FMM,
— Welcome address by SEDOS President St. Mary Barron, OLA
09:30 – 10:30 — Talk by Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Secretary of the
Dicastery for Evangelization

10:30 – 11:00 — Short break

11:00 – 12:00 — Talk by Prof. Paolo Trianni, Gregorian University (in Italian)
12:00 – 12:45 — Interaction and discussion (10 minutes for sharing,
followed by a general discussion).

13:00 – 14:15 — Lunch break

— Afternoon Session – Moderator: **Fr. Edgardo A. Guzman, CMF**

14:15 – 15:15 — Talk by St. Lilianna Franco (online; in Spanish).

15:15 – 16:00 — Interaction and discussion (10 minutes for sharing,
followed by a general discussion).

16:00 – 16:30 — Closing remarks by Fr. Márcio Flávio Martins, CICM
— Departure

SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR
16 - 20 JUNE 2025



OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

23 OCTOBER 2025 - SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR

THEME: From Ad Gentes to Inter Gentes -

**Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of 'Ad Gentes -
On the Mission Activity of the Church'.**

Venue: UISG, Piazza di Ponte Sant'Angelo, 28, 00186 Rome

SEDOS ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING

11 November 2025, UISG, Piazza di Ponte Sant'Angelo, 28, 00186 Rome

SEDOS CHRISTMAS PARTY

12 December 2025, SVD Generalate, Via dei Verbiti, 1 00154 Rome

