



Formation for Mission

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SEDOS

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

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SEDOS BULLETIN 2022

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Printing: Tipografia Salesiana Roma

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

The digital version of the articles, and an English translation of some of most of the articles,
can be found on the SEDOS website: www.sedosmission.org .

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Editorial



Dear Members and Readers,

Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD, was appointed the Director of SEDOS in June 2022. He was born in India on 27th June, 1962, and is a member of

the Congregation of Divine Word Society. He has been an active missionary in various parts of India. He specialized in Communication and has been working and teaching communication in various institutions and seminaries. He worked for 10 years (2000-2010), as the director of Mass Media Commission for Archdiocese of Delhi. He also worked for the conference of India for the Commission of Social Communications in Northern India, Madhya Pradesh Regions and Jaipur Diocese in Rajasthan State (2000-2022). He also headed the Communication Centre of the SVD Society in Indore for six years (2014-2020). He holds two doctoral degrees; one in Hindi Literature from Devi Ahilya University, Indore (India, 1995-1997), and another in Communication from the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome (2010-2014).

NEW EMERGING CHALLENGES

I feel privileged to be part of SEDOS. As a member of the Divine Word Society (SVD), I feel especially glad that I have been chosen for this great work for the mission. It is an opportunity not only for me but for all of us to think, reflect and explore. A new world, with new opportunities as well as new challenges, has emerged before us. We are called upon to put our heads and hearts together to find new ways to face them. When we come together, the mission becomes possible, for the Lord is there to guide us.

The growing fundamentalism, the post-Covid situation and the tussle between nations are some of the new situations that have arisen in recent times. As we share in the Mission of Jesus, we are all called upon

to share and bring the peace of Christ to the whole world and in particular to every heart.

SEDOS BULLETIN

This year, seeing the needs of the time, the theme for the Bulletin "*Formation for Mission*" was aptly chosen. As new challenges are emerging, SEDOS thought that there is a need to look into the formation of new missionaries who can explore and find new ways that are suitable for our time. At the Seminar we had very prominent speakers who enlightened the participants with their outstanding presentations.

In the Bulletin, the first article is by Antonio Pernia, SVD, who shares his reflection on the need to foster the missionary Spirit in formation, rather than focusing on the missionary work. In the second article, Maria Ha Fong Ko, FMA, in her Italian presentation explains how Jesus formed his disciples to become true missionaries. He called them to abide with him and having experienced him, he sent them out as shepherds. Mary L. Gautier, in her article, "International Sisters in the United States: Lessons We Have Learned" focuses on the situation of the religious sisters who came from various parts of the world and lived in the United States. They too are part of complex migration patterns that circle the world today. Then we have the article on "Formation and Accompaniment of Formators", by Len Kofler, MHM, and "The 'Why' of On-Going Formation" by Emma Paloma, ICM, inviting us to reflect deeply on formation itself. Another soul-searching presentation is by Daniele G. Giusti, MCCJ, on Covid-19 epidemics. The last article is by our former Director Peter Baekelmans, CICM, who takes us to the Past, Present and Future of the Missionary Religious Institutes and their Christian Witness.

I am sure these articles will help us to reflect and explore our understanding of formation for mission as well as to face the new situations and to become effective missionaries. *John Paul Herman, SVD*

Opening Address

Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, MCCJ, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, President of SEDOS.

Dear Participants of the Residential Seminar of SEDOS,

I welcome you all, on behalf of the Executive committee of SEDOS and the Director and all the Staff members of SEDOS Office. This year for our Residential Seminar, the theme chosen is *Formation for Mission*. We are going to consider this theme and as we deem it a very important reality for our communities, our congregations, and missionary Institutes and the whole Church. This Residential Seminar on Formation takes place just a day after Vocation Sunday, on which day we prayed for the gift of new vocations and the perseverance of many Brothers and Sisters in their response to the call already given and received.

During this Paschal Time or Eastertide, we have learned once again that at the base of our call and formation for the mission, stands the encounter with the Risen Christ. *"The evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', (20) and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, (21) and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you, As the Father sent me, so am I sending you' (22). After saying this he breathed on them and*

said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20:19-21).

We are talking about Formation for God's Mission, and this shows us that we are all called to be missionaries or as Pope Francis tells us we *are mission*, if we let ourselves be formed after and according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. *"My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an "extra" or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world", (EG, n. 273).*



Our Christian faith tells us that the community in the Church and the religious and missionary family which welcomes us needs to form and prepare us for God's Mission. We are called to be disciples who are called to learn who Jesus is and how we are supposed to follow Him at the service of the Gospel, proclaiming Jesus Christ, witnessing to the Gospel, and serving God and humanity in the work of evangelisation in building up God's Kingdom. To invest our personnel and resources in the formation of consecrated disciples is not optional, but a must for the present and the future of God's Mission. *"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (Jn 10:27).* Nowadays the reality of God's Mission, in which the Church and our communities and all of us are involved, is complex and multifaceted and has different aspects and features. The topics of our Residential

Seminar will try to address some of these issues.

What does it mean to form and to be formed as a missionary today, in an era of social communication, in an intercultural milieu, making the journey of sinodality and preaching human brotherhood?

What does it mean to form and be formed taking into consideration the issues of Justice, Peace, Human Dignity, difficult economic realities after the COVID pandemic, and the on-going wars and social conflicts in the world?

How can we include in our Formation the issue of our call to take care of our common home? How do we form, and let ourselves be formed in a spirit of sinodality, making our heart more and more open to make the journey together with the whole Church?

How do you form a Priest, a Brother or a Sister or a lay missionary to feel at ease when involving everybody in the mission?

How do we form our future missionaries who are sensitive to the issue of our vulnerability and fragile nature as Church and faith communities, who face with a lot of shame and guilt the story of the abuse minors and vulnerable persons?

Well, the Residential Seminar will give us the opportunity once again to reflect on some of these issues. We are all aware that the first important moment of personal formation is in prayer, in our daily encounter with God. We ready to be formed in our formation structures and in the Mission because we are responding to God's love for us and for the People of God.

“Our lives change when we welcome this gaze. Everything becomes a vocational dialogue between us and the Lord, but also between ourselves and others. A dialogue that, experienced in depth, makes us become ever more who we are. In the vocation to the ordained priesthood, to be instruments of

Christ's grace and mercy. In the vocation to the consecrated life, to be the praise of God and the prophecy of a new humanity. In the vocation to marriage, to be mutual gift and givers and teachers of life. In every ecclesial vocation and ministry that calls us to see others and the world through God's eyes, to serve goodness and to spread love with our works and words.” We participate in these days of reflection, accompanying them with prayer for the gift of Vocation, good and solid vocations because we need to persevere in our witness to Christ and the Good News.

“Let us pray, Brothers and Sisters, that the People of God, amid the dramatic events of history, may increasingly respond to this call. Let us implore the light of the Holy Spirit, so that all of us may find our proper place and give the very best of ourselves in this great divine plan!” (Rome, Saint John Lateran, 8 May 2022, Fourth Sunday of Easter. *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis, for the 2022 World Day of Prayer for Vocations*).

How can I conclude except by saying THANK YOU, to all those who are going to help us with their in-put, witness and sharing, THANKS to all those who contributed to prepare the Residential Seminar, Thanks to Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, out-going Executive Director of SEDOS for his commitment in all the years of service he has given in SEDOS, thanks to the staff of SEDOS, Sr. Celine Kokkat, CJMJ, and Sr. Christina, CJMJ. We thank Sr. Mary Barron, Superior General of OLA, Vice President of SEDOS and all the members of the Executive Committee of SEDOS who have helped to organize this Seminar and will help us in running and celebrating it. We thank the community of the Paulist Fathers-Brothers who have hosted us. We thank our Benefactors who helped us.

We are pleased to welcome during this Residential Seminar Rev. Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD, who will be the in-coming Executive Director of SEDOS.

The Importance of Fostering the Missionary Spirit

First of all, I would like to thank Fr. Peter Baekelmans for the invitation to contribute a reflection to this year's SEDOS Residential Seminar. The topic assigned to me is "The Importance of Fostering the Missionary Spirit." I believe central to this topic is the expression "missionary spirit." This will be the focus of this reflection, which will consist of two parts: (1) the first will be an exploration Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD into the nuances of the expression "missionary spirit," and (2) the second will be a consideration of some of the features or characteristics of this missionary spirit.

1. Nuances of the "Missionary Spirit"

Firstly, then, the nuances of the "missionary spirit." I believe the expression "missionary spirit" contains three important nuances, among others—namely, first, (1) the person of the missionary; second (2) missionary spirituality, and third (3) "*missio Spiritus*."



1.1 The Person of the Missionary

I believe the expression "missionary spirit" represents an important shift that has taken place in the understanding of mission over the last 30 years or so—namely, the shift from the stress on "missionary work" to the emphasis on the "missionary spirit," or the shift from the stress on the "work of the missionary" to the emphasis on the "person of the missionary." This shift, then, places the focus on the "person of the missionary." I think it can be said that this shift was triggered by the famous statement of Pope Paul VI in his 1975 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN),¹ no. 41: "Modern

man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Pope John Paul II echoes the same insight in his 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM),² no. 42, where he says: "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories."

From both statements, I believe we can see a shift of emphasis from the work of the missionary to the person of the missionary—that is, from the missionary as teacher to the missionary as witness. This is a shift of focus from what the missionary does to what the missionary is. A shift, in other words, from

"doing" to "being." Spanish speakers have nice expression for this. They speak of the shift from "*hacer*" to "*ser*"—*del hacer al ser*³—*del hacer como misionero/a al ser misionero/a*.

As we know, both popes regard mission or evangelization as a "complex process made up of varied elements" (EN 24), or as a "single but complex reality which develops in a variety of

ways" (RM 41). EN enumerates seven elements (EN 17-24), while RM lists eight ways (RM 41-59). In both lists, "witness" figures as the first of the elements or ways (EN 24, 26; RM 41).

In view of this, I think it can also be said that, while "missionary formation" in the past centered on equipping the missionary with various skills needed for his or her work

[vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/evangelii-nuntiandi.html).

² See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_-_redemptoris-missio.html.

³ See, for instance, Dora Gil, *Del Hacer Al Ser* (Malaga, Spain: Editorial Sirio, 2019).

¹ See Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/paul->

as a missionary, today missionary formation focuses on developing the attitudes required of the missionary as witness. While in the past, the accent was on the effectivity of one's work as a missionary, today the stress is on the credibility of one's witness as a missionary. While in the past, the emphasis was on missionary work, today the accent is on the missionary spirit.

1.2 Missionary Spirituality

This shift of emphasis has naturally led to an interest in "missionary spirituality." In fact, the three main missionary documents of the recent popes dedicate a chapter or section to a reflection on missionary spirituality—that is, Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (76-82), John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (chapter VIII), and Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG)⁴ (chapter V).

(1) Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (76-82)

In no. 76 of EN, Paul VI says: "Let us now consider the very persons of the evangelizers." He places his consideration of the person of the evangelizer in the context of humanity's thirst of authenticity and search for truth and honesty, especially among the young. And so, he exhorts bishops, priests, deacons, religious, families and the laity: "our evangelizing zeal must spring from true holiness of life, and, as the Second Vatican Council suggests, preaching must in its turn make the preacher grow in holiness, which is nourished by prayer and above all by love for the Eucharist" (EN 76). And he adds:

... the world is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelizers themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible. The world calls for and expects from us simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, especially towards the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility, detachment and self-

sacrifice. Without this mark of holiness, our word will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern man. It risks being vain and sterile (EN 76).

Paul VI warns against the danger of a lack of fervor, which is manifested in "fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope." He, therefore, exhorts agents of evangelization to "always nourish spiritual fervor" (EN 80). And, in what seems to be a good description of the "missionary spirit," he says:

Let us therefore preserve our fervor of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us—as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history—an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench (EN 80).

(2) John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Chapter VIII)

Chapter VIII of RM is entitled "Missionary Spirituality" (RM 87-91). The center of this chapter seems to be John Paul II's statement that "the true missionary is the saint" (RM 90). Here, he develops a missionary spirituality based on the insight that the call to mission is derived from the call to holiness. Every Christian is called to mission because every Christian is called to holiness. As he puts it: "The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission" (RM 90). He adds:

The renewed impulse to the mission ad gentes demands holy missionaries. It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources, or delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new "ardor for holiness" among missionaries ... (RM 90).

⁴ See Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

In this chapter of RM, John Paul II lays out what may be considered as the “characteristics” of missionary spirituality. Five such characteristics may be discerned—namely, a true missionary is one who is: (1) Led by the Spirit (RM 87), (2) Centered in Christ (RM 88), (3) Marked by Apostolic Charity (RM 89), (4) a Person of the Beatitudes (RM 91), and (5) a Contemplative in Action (RM 91). John Paul II emphasizes particularly the last point, and says:

... the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He [or she] is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the apostles: "that which we have looked upon ... concerning the word of life, ... we proclaim also to you" (1 Jn 1:1-3) (RM 91).

Thus, he appeals to every member of the faithful, saying: “Dear brothers and sisters: let us remember the missionary enthusiasm of the first Christian communities. Despite the limited means of travel and communication in those times, the proclamation of the Gospel quickly reached the ends of the earth” (RM 90).

(3) Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

(Chapter V)

In no. 78 of EG, Pope Francis laments the fact that for many in the Church—including consecrated men and women—“the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor (EG 78).

Pope Francis elaborates on this insight in Chapter V of EG, where he says that “we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity There is always the risk that some

moments of prayer can become an excuse for not offering one’s life in mission” (EG 262). Thus, Pope Francis encourages a “spirituality of encounter”—a spirituality of going forth from one’s comfort zones and encountering “the other” in the peripheries of society (see EG 259, 272). This is a spirituality that is not separate from one’s mission engagement, but rather one that arises precisely from one’s mission. As Pope Francis puts it: “If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries” (EG 272).

According to Pope Francis, what we need today are “Spirit-filled missionaries”—that is, “evangelizers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit” (EG 259). He says:

Spirit-filled evangelization is not the same as a set of tasks dutifully carried out despite one’s own personal inclinations and wishes. How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction. Yet, I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel (EG 261).

For Pope Francis, at the heart of missionary spirituality is the experience of the “joy of the Gospel” (*evangelii Gaudium*). For every genuine encounter with Jesus is an experience of joy. The Gospel, therefore, is an invitation to joy. And so, proclaiming the Gospel is also an experience of joy. He says: “Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary” (EG 272). Only a Spirit-filled missionary who manifests the joy of the Gospel can evangelize by attraction (see EG 15).

1.3 Missio Spiritus

The interest in missionary spirituality has led, in its turn, to a re-consideration of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission, resulting in the understanding of mission as “*missio*

Spiritus” or the “mission of the Spirit.” Indeed, ever since John Paul II’s assertion in RM that the Holy Spirit is the “principal agent of mission” (RM, chapter III), echoing Paul VI’s statement in EN that the Holy Spirit is the “principal agent of evangelization” (EN 75), “*missio spiritus*” has become a common expression in missiology.⁵

Missio Spiritus is generally regarded as a more specific version of *Missio Dei* or “God’s Mission.”

The Pentecostal theologian, Amos Yong, presents an attempt at a theology of *Missio Spiritus* in an article in the *International Review of Mission*, entitled “Primed for the Spirit: Creation, Redemption and the *Missio Spiritus*.”⁶ Based on this article, I think it can be said that *missio Spiritus* underlines the notion of mission as God breathing the breath of life into our world.

The *Ruah Elohim*, the divine breath, which hovers over the primeval waters, infuses the dust of the ground with life and thereby constitutes all of created reality. It hovers over Mary and descends on the Incarnate Son, whose life, death and resurrection inaugurate the reconstitution of reality estranged from the Creator by sin. It is poured out on the Church so that it may be poured out on all flesh toward the final reconciliation of all things with God and the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth, “God’s dwelling place among the people” (Rev 21:3).

It is interesting to note that the classical doctrine of the Trinity⁷ speaks about the Son

proceeding from the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. The procession of the Son from the Father is called “generation,” while the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is called “spiration.” The Son is “generated” or begotten by the Father, and the Spirit is “spirated” or breathed forth by the Father and the Son. *Missio Spiritus* can therefore be considered as an extension of the “spiration” of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. *Missio Spiritus* is the Father and the Son breathing forth the Spirit into the world.

It would seem, then, that it is not enough to say, as Pope Paul VI did in EN 75 and Pope John Paul II in RM 21, that the Holy Spirit is “the principal agent of evangelization or mission,” as if mission were something external to the Spirit. Rather, in the light of *Missio Spiritus*, it would seem more appropriate to say that the “Holy Spirit IS mission.” So, mission is God sharing the gift of his Spirit. In other words, it is God sharing his breath, his very life, his very self. Summarizing this first part of our reflection, I think it can be said that the “missionary spirit,” which needs to imbue the person of the missionary, refers to the fervor (Paul VI), the enthusiasm (John Paull II) and the joy (Francis) of proclaiming the Gospel. Such is the spirit of mission because the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission, or even, because the Holy Spirit is mission.

2. Features of the “Missionary Spirit” Today

Coming now to the second part of this reflection, I would like to elaborate on this missionary spirit by attempting to indicate some of its fundamental features. And I would like to do so by considering the implications of today’s mission paradigm which is the understanding of mission as “*missio Dei*,” or God’s mission.

ed. By Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 1046-1061.

⁵ See for instance, José Cristo Rey Paredes, *Accomplices of the Spirit: The New Paradigm of Mission* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc., 2018); Bård Mæland, “A Free-Wheeling Breath of Life? Discerning the *Missio Spiritus*,” *International Review of Mission*, Volume 102, Number 2 (November 2013), 137-147; Amos Yong, “Primed for the Spirit: Creation, Redemption and the *Missio Spiritus*,” *International Review of Mission*, Volume 100, Number 2 (November 2011), 355-366.

⁶ See Amos Yong, *ibid*.

⁷ See, for instance, Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), 355; Edmund J. Dobbin, “Trinity” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*,

2.1 Missio Dei

Missio Dei, as a modern missiological concept, can be traced back to the work of Karl Barth in the 1930's, particularly to a paper he read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, in which he articulated the idea of mission as an activity of God himself.⁸ Since then, *Missio Dei* has become the new paradigm of mission, whereby mission is seen not primarily as an activity of the Church but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God, and mission is a movement from God to the world. The Church is viewed as an instrument for this mission. Thus, the classical doctrine of the Trinity, whereby the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit, is expanded to include yet another "sending," that is, the Father, Son and Spirit sending the Church into the world. And so, the Church, instead of being the "sender" is the one "sent." Thus, there is Church because there is mission, and not vice versa.

In Catholic theology, the idea of *Missio Dei* is contained in the documents of Vatican II. In particular, *Ad Gentes*, Vatican II's "Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church," traces the origin of the mission of the Church to the sending by the Father of the Son and the Holy Spirit in order to bring about God's universal plan of salvation (AG 1-2, 9).⁹ This idea has come to be known as "the Trinitarian origin of Mission." The fundamental insight of *missio Dei*, therefore, is that the origin of mission is God and not human beings or the Church. Mission is there not because the church has mandated it but because God is a Triune God.

⁸ See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-393; Eddie Arthur, "Missio Dei and the Mission of the Church," [posted 06-2013], www.wycliffe.net/missiology?id=3960.

⁹ Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

The Triune God is communion and communication, interaction and dialogue, between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this inner communication or dialogue overflows into—or better, embraces—creation and history. Mission, then, is the Triune God's ongoing dialogue with the world and with humanity, a dialogue that invites and draws humanity into full communion with the Divine community. Mission is the overflow into the world of the intra-Trinitarian dialogue and communion between Father, Son and Spirit.

Our call to mission is a call to participate in this ongoing dialogue. Thus, we say mission is God's first and foremost. We, missionaries or the church, are called only to share and collaborate in this mission which is God's.

2.2 Implications of Missio Dei

Missio Dei, as the new paradigm for mission, requires, among other things, the following attitudes of the missionary: (1) contemplation, (2) dialogue, (3) humility, (4) collaboration, and (5) joy.

(1) Contemplation

Missio Dei underlines the fact that our participation in God's Mission is fundamentally an encounter with mystery—the mystery of the Triune God who calls all of humanity to share in his life and glory, the mystery of God's salvific plan for the world, the mystery of the presence of Christ and the action of the Spirit in the world. Thus, the very first challenge in mission is to seek out, discern and strengthen the presence of Christ and the action of the Spirit in the world. But it will be impossible to discern if we do not approach mission in contemplation.

The missionary, then, evangelizes not primarily by doing things for the people but by being with them and enabling them to do things themselves. The missionary's mission method will be marked not by frenetic activity but by contemplative presence among God's people. The missionary will not be tempted to explain away the mystery of God, but rather try to lead people into this very mystery through signs and symbols in

respectful dialogue. He or she will give priority to *being missionary* over *doing missionary things*.

Thus, one expectation of missionaries today is the development of a contemplative spirit in mission. We need to abandon the idea that contemplation is the opposite of mission. We need, rather, to promote the idea that contemplation is a constitutive dimension of mission. For, in fact, contemplation entails not just an “ascending moment” of gazing at God’s face in prayer, meditation, adoration but also a “descending moment” of gazing at the world with the eyes of God. And how different would our world be if we all learned to see the world with the eyes of God. For under the gaze of God’s eyes, enemies become friends, separating walls become open doors, strangers become brothers or sisters, borders become bridges, diversity leads not to differences and conflict but to harmony and unity.

(2) Dialogue

Understanding mission as *Missio Dei*, or the Triune God’s ongoing dialogue with the world, changes our view of mission. It corrects the notion of mission as a one-way traffic, where everything is done by the missionary for the people. The missionary is the evangelizer, the people the evangelized. The missionary is the bearer of good news, the people the recipient of the gospel. The missionary is the subject, the people the object. The missionary is the preacher who proclaims the truth, the people the ones needing conversion. The assumption was that the people are completely devoid of any spiritual treasure, and therefore have nothing to share in return.¹⁰ This is the reality that is evoked by a purely “*Ad Gentes*” understanding of mission.

This way of viewing mission operated out of medieval theology where the Church believed herself to be the one and only bastion of truth. Other religions were

¹⁰ “We are not the ‘haves,’ the *beati possidentes*, standing over against the spiritual ‘have nots,’ the *massa damnata*.” David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 484.

regarded as in error at best and demonic at worst. And the Church saw it as her moral obligation to conquer, dominate and replace these religions. *Missio Dei*, however, makes us realize that there is no situation that is completely devoid of God’s Spirit. As documents of Vatican II affirm, other religious and cultural traditions contain “seeds of the Word” (AG 11) or “rays of the Truth” (NA 2). They are not entirely evil or totally in error.

Thus, mission is now understood as a two-way exchange of gifts between the missionary and the people. Consequently, missionaries must be ready to give and receive, to evangelize and be evangelized, to speak and to listen. They must be prepared to change and be changed, to form and be formed, to invite to conversion and be converted themselves.¹¹ This is the implication of the newer understanding of mission as not only “*Ad Gentes*” but also “*Inter Gentes*.”

Dialogue is no longer simply an option that we are at liberty to do or not do. Rather, it is now a missiological imperative that we cannot do without. As a 1984 document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue states, dialogue is “the norm and necessary manner of every form as well as of every aspect of Christian mission Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel.”¹²

¹¹ This idea is also sometimes expressed as “mission in reverse”, i.e., “we need to be evangelized by the people before we can evangelize them; we need to allow the people among whom we work to be our teachers before we presume to teach them,” See Claude Marie Barbour, “Seeking Justice and Shalom in the City,” *International Review of Mission* 73 (1984): 303-309, as cited in Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (NY: Orbis, 2011), p. 59.

¹² See Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions*, 1984, No. 29, <https://www.cam1.org.au/Portals/66/documents/Dialogue-Mission-1984.pdf>.

2.3 Humility.

Missio Dei entails that the missionary is never the “owner” or “master” of the gospel, but only its “steward” and “servant.” And so, the gospel can only be shared as a gift and never as one’s possession.

This seems to have been one of the problems with mission in the past. Coming largely from Christian Europe, missionaries in the past preached the gospel as if the Christian faith was their possession, dictating thereby the terms by which it must be understood (doctrine/dogma), lived (morals/ethics) and celebrated (liturgy/worship). Coming, likewise, from what was assumed to be a “superior” culture and from economically developed and technologically advanced countries, missionaries in the past often evangelized from a position of power and superiority. And apparently, this assumed superiority gave them the right to impose the Christian faith on peoples who were considered “culturally primitive,” “religiously pagan,” “economically poor” and “technologically backward.”

Today, then, the missionary is called to evangelize from a position of powerlessness, lowliness and humility.¹³ He or she will not seek power—economic, cultural, technological, or even media power. The only power he or she will need is the power of the Word and of the Spirit. And that power is the power of love, which is manifested in self-giving. The ultimate reason for humility in mission is that mission is God’s and not ours. Put differently, the Kingdom of God is an eschatological reality. And, even if we are called and sent to work for it, we do not know how, when and in what form God’s Kingdom will finally emerge in the world. And so, another expectation of missionaries today is the development of the spirit of humility and powerlessness in mission.

¹³ See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 484.

2.4 Collaboration

Seeing mission as *Missio Dei* makes us realize that our call to mission is a call to share in God’s mission, which implies a call to collaborate with God, first of all, and with all others who are similarly called by God. *Missio Dei* implies that mission is larger than what each individual or each congregation can do. It is even larger than what all of us together can do. Collaboration, then, is not just a strategy for mission. We collaborate not just because we want to be more effective in mission. Collaboration, in fact, is an essential characteristic of mission. To be in mission is to collaborate. Collaboration is a statement about the nature of mission. By collaborating we are saying that mission is God’s in the first place and that the primary agent of mission is God’s Spirit.

The work of the Spirit whom we share in mission is multiform.¹⁴ In the Church, one manifestation of this is the diversity of charisms which the Spirit distributes “as He wishes” (1 Cor 12:11) among the People of God for the building up of the Body of Christ in order to enable it to carry out its mission. Often these gifts of the Spirit are embodied in different ecclesial groups—institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, traditional Church organizations, and the newer ecclesial movements or “new communities” with a predominantly lay membership. Together these ecclesial groups manifest the multiform richness of the ecclesial communion for the sake of mission.¹⁵

The work of the Spirit in the world is also multiform. A manifestation of this is the

¹⁴ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church, No. 1, www.vatican.va/roman.../rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, No. 15, w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/.../hf_jp-ii_exh_-06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html.

¹⁵ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, No. 2.

phenomenon of cultural and religious pluralism in the world. Plurality and diversity in the world may be regarded as the fruit of God's creative act, reflecting God's own being. For the God we worship is not a solitary monad but a *koinonia* of three divine persons.¹⁶ Today religious pluralism is regarded not just as a "matter of fact," but as a "matter of principle,"¹⁷ that is, it is not just an accident in history, much less the result of human sinfulness, but part of God's salvific plan for the world. So, just as the Spirit adorns the Church with a diversity of charisms, so also the Spirit adorns the world with a diversity of religions and cultures.

This fact of the multiform character of the Spirit's action in the Church and in world necessitates collaboration and dialogue—among the different ecclesial groups in the Church, and among the various religions and cultures in the world.

2.5 Joy

In an ecclesiocentric view of mission, where mission is seen as a response to the "mission mandate" given by the Risen Lord to the Church on the day of the ascension (see Mt 28:18-20), there is a tendency to regard mission as a sacrifice and a burden—particularly, the giving up of home and country in order to go too far-away lands, the giving up of a life of comfort, and the readiness of live a life of deprivation and hardship in conditions of life often called "primitive."

Among some missionary congregations, like my own, the start of one's missionary life is ritualized in a mission-sending ceremony which includes the rite of the giving of a "mission cross." While the "mission cross" actually has a more profound meaning, in the minds of many it symbolizes the sacrifice

¹⁶ See Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p. xxi.

¹⁷ See Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 201; Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 65; Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, pp. 7-8.

and hardship that the missionary is expected to undertake in mission. In such ceremonies, often a passage from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians is read, where Paul lists the difficulties he underwent in his mission of preaching the Gospel:

... with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; ... (2 Cor 11:23-25).

Generation after generation of missionaries have similar stories of difficulties and hardships encountered in mission. Volumes have been written about the great sacrifice offered by missionaries for the mission. However, seeing mission as *Missio Dei* makes us realize that mission is not just a burden and a sacrifice but a privilege and a gift. Mission is God's mission, and our call to mission is a call to participate in God's mission. And participation in God's mission cannot just be a burden and a sacrifice. It must be, above all, a gift and a privilege.¹⁸

Missio Dei shifts the motive for mission from a need on the part of those being evangelized (that is, the need of the so-called "pagans" to be saved from eternal damnation) to a need on the part of the evangelizers (namely, the need of the disciple who has experienced the Gospel as good news to share it with others).¹⁹ This

¹⁸ When St. Joseph Freinademetz, the first SVD missionary, learned that he was going to be sent to China, he wrote to his family saying: "Thank God ... that the Lord has given us the grace of having a missionary in our family ... I do not consider this as a sacrifice that I offer to God, but as the greatest gift that God is giving me". And again, from China he wrote: "I cannot thank the Lord enough for having made me a missionary in China...." In 1887 he said: "When I think of the countless graces that I have received and continue to receive until now from God ... I confess that I could cry. The most beautiful vocation in the world is being a missionary." See Giuseppe Freinademetz, *Lettere di un Santo*, a cura di Pietro Irsara (Bolzano: Impresa, [no year]).

¹⁹ As Pope Paul VI says in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No.

seems to be the “logic of good news.” If something is really good, then it needs to be shared with others. As Pope Francis puts it, the real wellspring of mission is the experience of the Joy of the Gospel (see EG 1-13). So, mission as sharing in *Missio Dei* cannot just be a sacrifice and a burden. It must be a privilege and gift, an experience of joy, joy in the Spirit (see Gal 5:22).

To sum up this second part of our reflection, I think it can be said that mission today needs to be carried out under the paradigm of *Missio Dei* or God’s mission. This new paradigm calls for missionaries to be more contemplative, dialogical, humble, collaborative, and joyful in their mission. These too, I believe, are the features that characterize the “missionary spirit”—contemplation, dialogue, humility, collaboration and joy.

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3. Conclusion

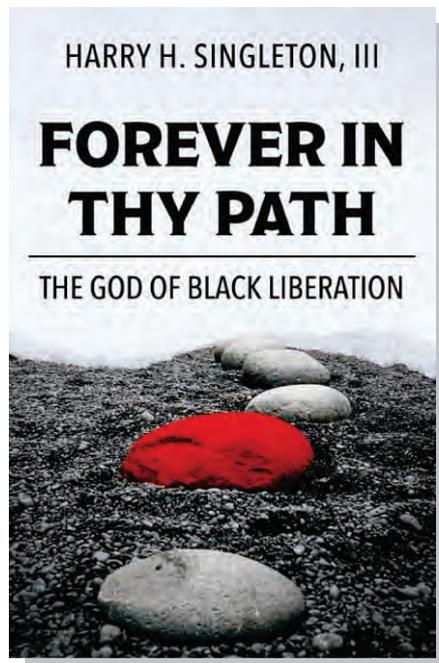
To conclude, allow me to quote what Pope Francis says in no. 273 of EG:

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs.

“I am a mission on this earth,” Pope Francis says. Herein lies the importance of fostering the missionary spirit.

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80: “... [people] can gain salvation also in other ways, by God’s mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame—what St. Paul called “blushing for the Gospel”—or as a result of false ideas we fail to preach it?”

Come Gesù forma i suoi discepoli ad essere missionari?



Inizio con un piccolo racconto:

Un maestro di calligrafia scuote la testa di fronte all'esercitazione

dell'alunno e gli chiede: "Hai mai visto qualcosa di più brutto?" L'alunno, mortificato e imbarazzato, risponde timidamente: "Sì". E tira fuori da sotto il banco un fascio di prove fatte precedentemente, una più brutta dell'altra.

Per questa riflessione, che ora condivido con voi, ho fatto diversi tentativi di strutturazione del pensiero e di organizzazione del materiale, ma una prova risultava sempre meno soddisfacente dell'altra, perché il tema sembra semplice, ma non lo è. "Come Gesù forma i suoi discepoli ad essere missionari?" È una domanda impegnativa a cui riusciamo soltanto a dare qualche risposta parziale, cercando di comprendere nel miglior modo possibile ciò che ci lasciano intravedere i Vangeli. Gesù non ha elaborato un progetto formativo o una *ratio formationis*, definendo con chiarezza la finalità, i percorsi, i metodi, i criteri della sua azione formativa. Eppure una progettazione non manca. Egli stesso insegna ai discepoli a «sedersi a calcolare», a prevedere e provvedere il necessario, prima di accingersi a costruire una torre (cf *Lc* 14,28-39). Non manca nemmeno un metodo specifico, o uno stile pedagogico. Fin dall'inizio della sua predicazione, la gente si stupisce e riconosce qualcosa di peculiare in questo maestro: «Egli insegna con autorità e non come gli scribi» (*Mc* 1,21).

Dunque, quali sono queste caratteristiche? Le cerchiamo nei Vangeli, senza la certezza di aver capito tutto bene, senza la pretesa di completezza o di precisione, ma con umiltà,

con la disposizione a lasciarci sorprendere e con un po' di timore di rovinarne la bellezza. La mia proposta di riflessione si struttura in tre punti. Il primo è una visione panoramica, che condensa in tre verbi.

1. Venire – rimanere - andare

Sono tre verbi paradigmatici. Il "venire" e l'"andare", ricorrenti piuttosto nei sinottici, hanno il senso del movimento, mentre il "rimanere", tipicamente giovanneo, sottolinea l'interiorità. Le due dimensioni, tuttavia, non si escludono, ma interagiscono tra di loro. Venire-rimane-andare: sembrano indicare un processo, una serie di momenti che si susseguono, invece sono elementi spesso compenetranti l'uno nell'altro.

1.1 Venire

La persona di Gesù doveva esercitare un forte fascino sui suoi contemporanei. Diverse volte i Vangeli parlano di grandi folle che "vanno dietro a Gesù". Molti vedono in Lui un profeta inviato da Dio, altri aspettano da Lui una guarigione o un insegnamento, altri ancora sono semplicemente curiosi. Si tratta, comunque, nella maggioranza dei casi, di un "andare dietro a lui" fisico, occasionale, funzionale.

A differenza delle folle, i primi discepoli seguono Gesù dopo una chiamata, il più delle volte inaspettata. Questo appare chiaramente nelle scene di vocazione. Simone e Andrea erano alla pesca, quando Gesù, passando, disse loro: «Venite dietro a me» (*Mc* 1,17); subito dopo, chiamò anche Giacomo e Giovanni, ed essi «lo seguirono» (1,20). Nello stesso modo, un po' più tardi, egli chiamò Levi, seduto al banco dove si pagavano le tasse: «Gesù disse: "Seguimi". Egli, alzatosi, lo seguì» (*Mc* 2,14).

Sono racconti carichi di dinamismo. Gesù «*passando... vide*» (Mc 1,16). Il verbo *passare* segna un movimento, non solo quello dell'entrata in scena di Gesù, presso il lago della Galilea, ma soprattutto quello più significativo: il suo mettersi in cammino lungo le strade dell'uomo, il suo apparire nei luoghi dell'esistenza quotidiana, il suo inserirsi nella concretezza della storia umana, il suo impatto con le singole vite umane, il suo porsi a livello dell'uomo per incontrarlo sul suo terreno. È il mistero dell'incarnazione che culmina nel passaggio della Pasqua.

Nel *passare*, nel *camminare* di Gesù in mezzo agli uomini e alle donne si realizza il piano divino di salvezza. All'inizio della missione Gesù si presenta solo davanti a Giovanni per ricevere il battesimo, ma subito egli chiama i primi discepoli ad *andare dietro* a lui: egli vuol coinvolgere altri nel suo cammino; così, a mano a mano che procede, egli attira dietro a sé un numero sempre maggiore di uomini e donne che, con il cammino, condividono il suo ideale, la sua missione, il suo stile di vita, il suo destino.

Al *venire dietro* del discepolo corrisponde l'*andare davanti* del maestro. Gesù, infatti, *precede* i suoi discepoli, indicando loro la meta e diventando per loro «la via» per raggiungerla. Verso il termine del cammino terreno «Gesù *proseguì avanti agli altri* salendo verso Gerusalemme» (Lc 19,28), dove si realizza l'evento culmine della sua missione. Ma la croce e la morte non segnano il punto finale di questo cammino; egli, infatti, promette alla vigilia della sua morte: «Dopo la mia risurrezione, vi *precederò* in Galilea» (Mc 14,28). E nel discorso d'addio egli assicura ai suoi discepoli: «Io vado a prepararvi un posto; quando sarò andato e vi avrò preparato un posto, ritornerò e vi prenderò con me, perché siate anche voi dove sono io» (Gv 14,2-3). L'*andare dietro a Gesù* continua oltre il cammino in questo mondo e diventa senza confini, oltre il tempo e lo spazio. Questo pensiero è espresso anche nell'*Apocalisse*, in cui l'autore descrive i 144.000 santi che «seguono l'agnello dovunque vada» (Ap 14,4).

Dalla parte dei discepoli, l'accogliere la chiamata e seguire Gesù significa mettersi in movimento verso una nuova direzione della loro esistenza, in cui il punto di riferimento è la persona stessa di Gesù. Avranno, però, un lungo cammino da fare per scoprire più in profondità chi è questo Gesù e quale cambiamento comporta nella loro vita il mettersi in cammino dietro a lui.

Gesù sa bene che le sue parole e i suoi gesti trascendono le capacità reali di comprensione dei discepoli, sa che fanno fatica ad «andare dietro» a lui. Egli, quindi, li accompagna con pazienza e saggezza pedagogica, anche se qualche volta non si esime da domande di rimprovero come queste: «Non intendete e non capite ancora? Avete il cuore indurito?» (Mc 8,17-18). Di fatto, tutto il viaggio verso Gerusalemme, fino alla croce e alla risurrezione, è per i discepoli un lungo processo di formazione intensa e mirata.

1.2 Rimanere

Il *venire* traccia, in un primo momento, un movimento esteriore, ma si trasforma presto in un cammino spirituale. Giovanni lo illustra con chiarezza. Egli, fin dal racconto della vocazione dei primi discepoli (Gv 1,35-51), introduce la categoria del «*rimanere*», un verbo che ricorre nel suo Vangelo per ben 67 volte, 3 volte solo in questo episodio.

All'inizio della scena c'è Giovanni Battista, che proclama di fronte a Gesù: «Ecco l'agnello di Dio» (v.36). Con umiltà e discrezione egli funge come un dito indicatore, un ponte per favorire gli altri ad andare da Gesù. Due dei suoi discepoli, dietro la sua indicazione, seguono Gesù. E Gesù, avvertendo i passi timidi dietro di sé, «si voltò» e chiese: «Che cosa cercate?» Essi reagirono con una domanda: «Maestro, dove dimori? (nel testo greco: dove rimani?)». Gesù rispose: «Venite e vedrete». Andarono e videro dove egli dimorava e quel giorno rimasero con lui.

C'è qui una serie di movimenti, che sono a prima vista, esterni - seguire, voltarsi, andare, vedere - ma che esprimono un movimento interno ben più intenso e profondo. C'è

anche un intreccio di parole e di sguardi, di cercare e trovare, di domande e risposte, di pensieri e convinzioni, di invito e promessa, di attrazione e coinvolgimento. Alla fine tutto culmina nel “rimanere”, che diventa per i discepoli il punto di gravitazione e la fonte inesauribile di risorse per la loro vita e la loro missione.

«Maestro, dove dimori (rimani)?» e «rimasero presso di lui»: si nota un interessante rovesciamento di prospettiva: dal luogo dove rimane Gesù al luogo dove devono rimanere i discepoli. Essi vogliono informarsi sulla dimora di Gesù, mentre Gesù diventa la loro dimora.

“Rimanere in me”

Il “Rimanere” è precisato da un “in me” nella richiesta di Gesù, soprattutto nel suo discorso d’addio. Il “rimanere” ha una valenza doppia: indica la permanenza in un luogo e anche una stabile durata temporale. Ciò che Gesù chiede e, quasi, esige dai suoi, è un rapporto che include le dimensioni spazio-temporali, un rapporto intenso e profondo, saldo e dinamico. Rimanendo in Gesù il discepolo arriva a sintonizzarsi con lui giungendo gradualmente a quello che dice Paolo: «avere il pensiero di Cristo» (1Cor 2,26), «avere gli stessi sentimenti che furono in Cristo» (Fil 2,5).

Gesù usa l’immagine della vite e dei tralci per descrivere questa profonda comunione: «Chi rimane in me e io in lui, fa molto frutto» (Gv 15,4-5). Rimanendo costantemente in lui e lasciandosi penetrare sempre più intimamente e profondamente da lui, il discepolo rende la sua vita feconda. Il “portare frutto” implica anche una fecondità missionaria. Questa fecondità, conseguenza naturale dell’inabitazione reciproca, è a sua volta una caratteristica che contraddistingue il vero discepolo di Gesù: «In questo è glorificato il Padre mio: che portiate molto frutto e diventiate miei discepoli» (Gv 15,8). Il vero discepolo di Gesù non è mai sterile.

“Rimanere nella mia parola”

Come può «rimanere presso Gesù» chi non l’ha conosciuto durante la sua vita terrena?

Rimanere in lui significa rimanere nella sua Parola, quella pronunciata durante la sua esistenza storica, tramandata dai testimoni e fissata poi nella Scrittura. Nella Parola egli si fa presente oltre il limite del tempo e dello spazio. Il credere, cioè l’accoglienza e l’adesione iniziali, è fondamentale, ma Gesù esige dai suoi discepoli un grado più maturo di fede, alimentata e vivificata continuamente dalla Parola. Egli dice espressamente: «Se rimanete fedeli alla mia parola, sarete davvero miei discepoli; e conoscerete la verità e la verità vi farà liberi» (Gv 8,31-32). «Se rimanete in me e le mie parole rimangono in voi, chiedete quel che volete e vi sarà dato» (Gv 15,7).

Questo pensiero viene espresso più volte anche in forma negativa. Quando la folla mormora dopo il suo «discorso duro» sul pane di vita, Gesù chiede ai discepoli: «Forse anche voi volete andarvene?» (Gv 6,67). Colui che non rimane nella sua Parola è meglio che se ne vada, cioè non lo segua per nulla. In Gv 5,37-41 Gesù rimprovera ai giudei di non aver mai ascoltato la voce del Padre né interiorizzato la sua Parola, e la ragione profonda è questa: «Voi non avete la sua parola che dimora in voi, perché non credete a colui che egli ha mandato. [...] io vi conosco e so che non avete in voi l’amore di Dio».

“Rimanete nel mio amore”

Chiamato alla sequela di Gesù, il discepolo si lascia amare con gratitudine e semplicità, è coinvolto misteriosamente nella comunione d’amore esistente tra il Padre e il Figlio. È Gesù stesso che lo garantisce: «Come il Padre ha amato me, così anch’io ho amato voi. Rimanete nel mio amore» (Gv 15,9).

L’amore plasma e struttura la persona rendendola sempre più protesa verso l’altro. Rimanendo nell’amore di Dio il discepolo acquista una nuova visione della realtà, una nuova fonte di desideri. Egli desidera quello che vuole Dio. È in questo senso che Gesù dice: «Se osserverete i miei comandamenti rimarrete nel mio amore, come io ho osservato i comandamenti del Padre mio e rimango nel suo amore. [...] Voi siete miei

amici, se farete ciò che io vi comando» (Gv 15,10-12). Non si tratta dell'osservanza dei comandamenti imposti dall'esterno, ma è un affiatamento con la sfera di Dio, una sintonia in Dio, che fa sperimentare dentro di sé quella passione, quell'impulso missionario di cui Paolo dice: «l'amore di Cristo ci spinge» (2 Cor 5,14)

1.3 Andare

Il "seguire" Gesù e il "rimanere" in lui rendono i discepoli simili al Maestro. Il cuore allora si dilata nell'amore universale, gli occhi si aprono ad orizzonti più vasti e la mente assume la logica divina di gratuità generosa. La sequela sfocia nella missione, per cui il mandato missionario del Risorto - «Andate dunque e fate discepoli tutti i popoli ...» (Mt 28,19-20) nella versione di Matteo, o «... di me sarete testimoni a Gerusalemme, in tutta la Giudea e la Samaria e fino ai confini della terra» (At 1,8) nel racconto di Luca - non risulta come qualcosa di nuovo, qualcosa di aggiunto alla vocazione dei discepoli.

Mentre nel primo incontro con Gesù i discepoli udivano dal Maestro l'invito, «venite dietro di me» (Mt 4,19), ora questo stesso maestro, nell'ultimo incontro prima di tornare al Padre, dice ai discepoli: «Andate dunque e fate discepole tutte le nazioni» (Mt 28,19). Commenta Benedetto XVI: «Lo stare con Lui [Gesù] e l'essere inviati sembrano, a prima vista, escludersi a vicenda, ma evidentemente vanno insieme. I Dodici devono imparare a stare con Lui in un modo che permetta loro di essere con Lui, anche se vanno sino ai confini della terra. L'essere con Gesù porta per natura in sé la dinamica della missione, poiché l'intero essere di Gesù è, in effetti, missione» (BENEDETTO XVI, *Gesù di Nazaret*, 204).

La sequela di Cristo si realizza non solo con il "venire" da Gesù, ma anche con l'"andare" agli altri, cioè col prolungare la stessa missione di Gesù nel tempo e nello spazio. Lo scopo della sequela non è solo quello di «diventare discepoli di Gesù», ma è quello di «far diventare discepoli» altri, anzi «tutti», tutta l'umanità senza distinzione di etnia,

religione, stato sociale, sesso; perché a tutti è dato di divenire cittadini del regno di Dio.

È interessante vedere nel racconto giovanneo della chiamata dei primi discepoli una catena di attrazione e di testimonianza. Seguendo l'indicazione di Giovanni Battista, due dei suoi discepoli vanno dietro a Gesù, dopo essere rimasti con Gesù, uno dei due, Andrea, corre a chiamare suo fratello Pietro, dicendogli: «Abbiamo trovato il Messia». Lo stesso fa Filippo con l'amico Natanaele. Il "rimanere" con Gesù non è uno *standby* statico, non è come la solita conclusione delle storielle a lieto fine, "rimasero insieme e vissero felici e contenti", ma risulta uno slancio verso gli altri, una corsa al fratello.

Anche per Maria l'incontro con Dio sfocia in una corsa. «Maria si alzò e andò in fretta verso la regione montuosa» (Lc 1,39). Ella parte in fretta sfidando fatiche, disagi e pericoli. Intraprende un viaggio di circa 150 km su strade tortuose tra i monti. Il suo passo è agile e gioioso, perché ciò che riempie il suo cuore dà ali ai suoi piedi. È un viaggio di amicizia e di servizio, un viaggio missionario: ella porta ad altri la presenza di Dio entrato nel mondo, anche se ancora in una forma nascosta. L'immagine suggestiva di Maria in cammino evoca il celebre testo profetico: «Come sono belli sui monti i piedi del messaggero di un lieto annuncio...» (Is 52,7).

Dio ama servirsi della collaborazione delle persone per comunicare la sua presenza, la sua parola e i suoi doni. Il suo messaggio di salvezza corre con i passi umani, corre di bocca in bocca, di vita in vita, da cuore a cuore, creando una comunità di credenti. La fede convinta diventa un bene che si comunica. Così scrive Giovanni indicando la "metodologia" missionaria che piace a Dio: «quello che abbiamo veduto e udito, noi lo annunciamo anche a voi, perché anche voi siate in comunione con noi» (IGv 1,3). Ancor oggi la sequela di Cristo procede come un fuoco che ne accende un altro per divampare insieme. «La fede si rafforza donandola!», dice Giovanni Paolo II (*Redemptoris missio* 2); «L'amore cresce attraverso l'amore», gli fa eco Benedetto

XVI (*Deus caritas est* 18). E Francesco: «Ogni cristiano è missionario nella misura in cui si è incontrato con l'amore di Dio in Cristo Gesù; non diciamo più che siamo "discepoli" e "missionari", ma che siamo sempre "discepoli-missionari"». (*Evangelii Gaudium* 120).

2. Agricoltore – pescatore – pastore

Sono le metafore usate da Gesù per parlare della missione dei suoi discepoli. Sono anche i lavori, o i mestieri, più comuni della Palestina del suo tempo: l'agricoltura nella pianura, il pascolo nella zona montagnosa, la pesca intorno al lago di Galilea.

2.1 L'agricoltore

Nelle sue parabole Gesù parla del seminatore, dei lavoratori nelle vigne, dell'agricoltore che intercede presso il padrone perché lascia ancora un anno al fico sterile, dell'abbondanza della messe e del numero esiguo degli operai. «Io sono la vite vera e il Padre mio è l'agricoltore» (*Gv* 15,1). Egli applica l'immagine dell'agricoltore persino al Padre. È bello pensare a un Dio, non seduto con maestà sul trono, ma sollecito e attento, chino sulla sua vite. Il contadino lavora molto, ma sa anche aspettare e rispettare i tempi della terra e il ritmo della crescita della pianta. Deve lottare, soprattutto nella terra arida della Palestina, contro un deserto che avanza, ma ha fiducia nella forza del seme che cresce da solo e nella vita che germoglia nel buio e nel silenzio; nutre la speranza che il granello di senapa diventi un albero rigoglioso e che il seme caduto su un terreno buono fruttifichi cento volte tanto.

Seguendo Gesù, anche altri autori del Nuovo Testamento applicano, con perspicacia, la metafora dell'agricoltore alla vita e alla missione dei cristiani. Molto conosciuto e bello è, per esempio, il brano della Lettera di Giacomo: «Guardate l'agricoltore: egli aspetta con costanza il prezioso frutto della terra finché abbia ricevuto le prime e le ultime piogge. Siate costanti anche voi, rinfrancate i vostri cuori, perché la venuta del Signore è vicina» (*Gc* 5,7-8).

2.2 Il pescatore

«Venite dietro a me, vi farò diventare pescatori di uomini» (*Mc* 1,17). Pescatori, ha detto Gesù. Non cacciatori. Non inseguitori. Anche il pescatore conosce l'attesa, la pazienza, la speranza, la fiducia. È un uomo aperto alle sorprese, disposto all'avventura, al rischio, alla novità. Egli getta la rete nell'immenso mare, immerge i suoi desideri nella profondità ignota e poi attende con fiducia. Non indaga come facciano i pesci ad entrare nella rete, non li prende di mira, non corre loro dietro, non li costringe ad entrare, non crea trappole; soltanto getta la rete, la tiene aperta e attende. Non è un'attesa noiosa, passiva o vuota la sua, anzi! È carica di dinamismo emotivo e di mille piccole attenzioni.

Chi dorme non piglia pesci. Il pescatore non dorme, ma veglia e vigila su tutto: egli bada all'equilibrio e all'andamento giusto della barca, percepisce il giro della corrente, coglie la direzione e la forza del vento, legge le mutazioni del tempo, scruta una quantità di segni che ai più non dicono niente.

Il pescatore non resta sulla terra ferma, ma sta su una barca che galleggia su un mare non sempre tranquillo. Deve saper accordarsi con il vento, con l'aria, con le onde; deve mettere in conto la tempesta e tutti gli imprevisti possibili. Egli è un essere fragile e piccolo, esposto tra due immensità infinite: il cielo e il mare. Più lontano si spinge dalla sponda più cresce l'insicurezza. Ogni partenza è un rischio, ogni ritorno una grazia. Con la rete immersa nel mare il pescatore ascolta attentamente il silenzio per scorgervi ogni lieve sussurro, ogni impercettibile movimento dell'acqua, come colui che sta con l'orecchio teso, vicino alla porta, per sentire i passi dell'amico ed essere pronto ad aprirgli quando bussava. Tutti sono benvenuti, pesci grandi e piccoli, rari o comuni.

Il momento di tirare su la rete è sempre emozionante. Alle volte la rete esce dall'acqua piena, pesante, gonfia di ogni specie di pesci luccicanti. Se le braccia di uno non bastano, ci sono i fratelli, i colleghi, i vicini, gli amici. Tutti sono pronti a dare

una mano, a rallegrarsi dell'abbondanza. La gioia di uno è la gioia di tutti. La fortuna è contagiosa. Alle volte, però, dopo una lunga attesa, dopo aver faticato e sudato tanto, la rete sale leggera, emerge come un vecchio straccio, bagnato e consumato. Delusione? Tristezza? No! Il pescatore non si scoraggia e non si arrende facilmente: egli sa riempire il vuoto della rete con un supplemento di speranza. Domani la getterà di nuovo, forse più lontano, più in profondità. Domani sarà un nuovo giorno, un nuovo stupore!

A Gesù piace tanto il lavoro del pescatore da assumerlo a immagine del regno dei cieli. Ai suoi primi discepoli che erano pescatori Gesù chiede di cambiare non il lavoro, ma solo i destinatari: con la stessa arte, anziché pesci, pescheranno uomini.

Un giorno, richiesto di pagare la moneta di tributo per il tempio, Gesù manda Pietro a prenderla dalla bocca di un pesce (cf *Mt* 17,24-27). Così questi suoi simpatici amici guizzanti diventano il suo portafoglio. Una preziosa lezione per noi: per diventare suoi testimoni e missionari bisogna saper scoprire la moneta d'argento nascosta in ogni pesce.

2.3 Il pastore

Visto come qualcuno che vive con e per il gregge il pastore è simbolo di dedizione. L'immagine del pastore attraversa l'intera Scrittura, dalla *Genesi all'Apocalisse*. Israele l'applica a Dio, il quale, come un buon pastore, vigile, attento e premuroso, si prende cura del popolo con amore, lo guida, lo nutre, lo difende, si fa compagno di cammino.

Nel NT il pastore è soprattutto Gesù Cristo. «Io sono il buon pastore» (*Gv* 10,11-14) è una delle autoaffermazioni esplicite di Gesù. Egli conosce per nome, cioè intimamente, le sue pecore, le difende dai pastori falsi e malvagi, le guida a pascoli fertili e le protegge, diventando lui stesso porta di sicurezza; va a cercare le pecore che ancora non lo conoscono, si mette in moto per ritrovare le pecore che si perdono, fosse anche una sola, e arriva persino a dire: «Do la mia vita per le pecore» (*Gv* 10,15). E lo ha fatto. Con la morte in croce.

I discepoli partecipano alla missione pastorale di Gesù. Egli stesso affida loro questa missione. Significativo è il brano *Gv* 21, 15-17 in cui Gesù Risorto, solennemente, per tre volte, affida il suo gregge a Pietro - «pasci i miei agnelli/le mie pecorelle» - dopo aver chiesto e ottenuto per tre volte la sua confessione d'amore. C'è una circolazione d'amore. Chi ama Gesù, condivide il suo amore al gregge. Il gregge è prezioso per Gesù, per questo Egli lo affida solo a chi ha l'amore.

«I pastori devono avere l'odore delle pecore» (*Evangelii Gaudium* 24): è un geniale aforismo inventato da Papa Francesco. È immediatamente comprensibile, per cui ogni commento o spiegazione ne rovinerebbe l'incisività. Analogamente possiamo dire che ogni pescatore deve avere l'odore dei pesci e ogni contadino deve avere lo sporco della terra. Questo è un principio non marginale nell'insegnamento di Gesù sulla missione.

3. “C'erano Pietro e Giovanni, Giacomo e Andrea”

Gesù forma i suoi discepoli non con lezioni private, individuali, ma in gruppo. E li manda in missione a due a due. Il senso comunitario, ecclesiale, della missione è chiaro, e la capacità relazionale è una dimensione essenziale nella formazione missionaria impartita da Gesù.

Chi sono i discepoli della comunità scelta e costituita da Gesù stesso? Gli evangelisti riportano i loro nomi (cf *Mc* 3,16-19; *Mt* 10,2-4; *Lc* 6,13-16; *At* 1,13), senza soddisfare le nostre curiosità sulla loro personalità, sul loro cammino di crescita, sulle loro relazioni all'interno della comunità, ecc. Non abbiamo dati anagrafici o biografici sufficienti per ricostruire la fisionomia dei singoli apostoli, ma da quel poco che sappiamo possiamo constatare che Gesù ama la diversità e vuole attorno a sé una comunità vivace ed eterogenea.

I “dodici apostoli” sono di provenienza diversa. Si sa che Filippo è di Betsaida (*Gv* 1,44), Pietro e Andrea hanno la casa a Cafarnao (*Mc* 1,29), Simone è di origine

cananea (Mc 3,18), Bartolomeo, che la tradizione identifica con Natanaele, è di Cana di Galilea (Gv 21,2). Sotto il profilo sociale e professionale sono in maggioranza pescatori, si distingue Matteo che è invece esattore di tasse.

Alcuni seguivano già Giovanni Battista, quindi erano avviati, in qualche modo, ad una vita spirituale più intensa e più esigente; altri invece, come i pescatori sul lago di Tiberiade (Mc 1,16-20) o Matteo al banco delle imposte (Mt 9,7-9), immersi nella loro vita di gente comune e nel loro lavoro quotidiano, sono stati chiamati da Gesù all'improvviso, senza nessuna preparazione, né remota, né prossima.

Prima di diventare discepoli di Gesù molti di loro non si conoscevano, altri invece erano legati con vincoli di sangue o di amicizia. Andrea e Pietro, Giacomo e Giovanni, sono due coppie di fratelli; i pescatori sono compagni di lavoro; Filippo probabilmente è amico di Natanaele.

I dodici apostoli riflettono anche una diversità di ambiente di vita e di tendenze ideologiche. Accanto ai semplici pescatori di Galilea c'è Matteo, il pubblicano, Natanaele, un «vero israelita» (Gv 1,27), Simone, uno zelota.

Se dal loro profilo ci inoltriamo nel loro carattere e nella loro personalità, la diversità che emerge è ancora più grande. Nel gruppo attira molto l'attenzione Simone Pietro, uomo impulsivo, irruente, più portato ad agire che a riflettere («Signore, se sei tu, comandami di venire verso di te nelle acque», ma poi s'impaurì: Mt 14,28-32), più pronto a promettere che a mantenere la promessa («Signore, con te sono pronto ad andare in prigione e alla morte» Lc 22,33; «Darò la mia vita per te!» Gv 13,37). È un tipo che va facilmente agli estremi («Tu non mi laverai i piedi in eterno!»; «Signore, non solo i miei piedi, ma anche le mani e il capo!» Gv 13,8-9), che cade facilmente, ma che si rialza con prontezza non appena riconosciuto l'errore. È impaziente, fa tante domande di scatto, vuol avere chiaro tutto e subito, fa fatica ad aspettare e a sostare nel mistero perché è un

uomo concreto: ha bisogno di soluzioni, e ha sempre tante domande («Signore, se mio fratello commette colpe contro di me, quante volte dovrò perdonargli?» Mt 18,21; «Noi abbiamo lasciato tutto e ti abbiamo seguito; che cosa dunque ne avremo?» Mt 19,27; «Signore, dove vai? ... perché non posso seguirti ora?» Gv 13,36-37). Egli segue Gesù con tutto l'ardore del suo carattere e con tutto il suo amore («Signore, tu sai che io ti amo» Gv 21,16-17) e Gesù gli affida il compito di guidare la Chiesa nascente.

Giovanni, invece, esprime il suo amore ardente per Gesù in modo molto diverso. Di temperamento forte pure lui (Giovanni e il fratello Giacomo vengono chiamati «*Boanèrges*, figli del tuono» Mc 3,17), è dotato di grande capacità di riflessione e d'intuizione, insieme ad una forte sensibilità per il mistero. È il teologo e il mistico del gruppo.

Andrea si fa conoscere come un uomo socievole, generoso, zelante, premuroso nel portare gli altri a Gesù. Quando scopre qualcosa di buono e di bello, s'affretta a dividerlo subito con gli altri. È lui a condurre il fratello Pietro da Gesù con un annuncio gioioso: «Abbiamo trovato il Messia» (Gv 1,41). Quando un gruppo di greci volevano vedere Gesù, è lui, insieme a Filippo, a facilitare l'incontro (cf Gv 12,20-22). È ancora lui a scoprire e a portare da Gesù il ragazzo con cinque pani e due pesci, contribuendo così al grande miracolo (cf Gv 6,8-9).

Somigliante ad Andrea da questo punto di vista è Filippo, il mediatore fra Natanaele e Gesù nel loro primo incontro («Vieni e vedi» Gv 1,46). Filippo è un uomo semplice, schietto; fa fatica ad andare oltre il visibile, a penetrare il senso più profondo della realtà («Duecento denari di pane non sono sufficienti neppure perché ognuno possa riceverne un pezzo» Gv 6,5-6. «Filippo, da tanto tempo sono con voi e non mi hai conosciuto?» Gv 14 8-9).

Come Filippo, e più di lui, anche Tommaso è lento a cogliere il mistero nella sua profondità. Tommaso è un tipo razionale, non si compromette e non rischia facilmente,

non si fida senza prove tangibili, non crede senza aver fatto esperienza personale («Signore, non sappiamo dove vai, come possiamo conoscere la via?») Gv 14,5. «Se non metto la mia mano nel suo costato, non crederò» (Gv 20.24-29).

Natanaele ha avuto il privilegio di ricevere un bell'elogio da Gesù fin dal primo incontro: «Ecco un vero Israelita in cui non c'è falsità». Questo l'ha fatto passare da uno scetticismo ironico - «Da Nazaret può mai venire qualcosa di buono?» - ad una domanda di stupore - «Come mi conosci?» - per giungere infine alla confessione di fede «Rabbi, tu sei il Figlio di Dio, tu sei il re d'Israele» (Gv 1,47-49).

Scorgiamo nel gruppo un silenzioso Giacomo, sempre presente negli avvenimenti importanti e sempre discreto: sarà lui il primo di loro a morire martire per la fede nel Maestro (At 12,1).

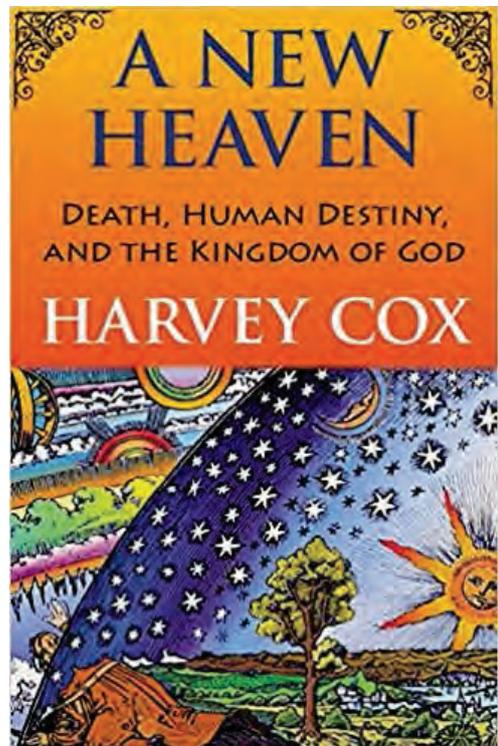
Matteo, il pubblicano, racconta la propria chiamata nel suo Vangelo (Mt 9,9-13). Gesù lo vede «seduto sul banco delle imposte» e gli dice: «seguimi». La sua risposta è immediata: si alza e lo segue, pronto ad iniziare una nuova vita. Gesù poi entra in casa sua e si fa commensale con lui e con altri suoi colleghi, all'obiezione dei farisei Gesù risponde dichiarando la sua missione di portando il perdono e la misericordia divina ai peccatori.

E nella lista sono citati anche un Giacomo di Alfeo, un Giuda di Giacomo, un Simone Zelota, di cui non conosciamo nulla al di là del nome. Infine c'è Giuda Iscariota, di carattere debole, uomo della "notte", impenetrabile dall'amore (Gv 13,30), alla fine compie un gesto assurdo, umanamente incomprensibile: tradisce Gesù.

Insomma, i discepoli non sono persone ideali, perfette, non rappresentano modelli indiscutibili, ma sono uomini comuni, diversi di carattere, con virtù e difetti "comuni a tutti i mortali". Litigavano qualche volta per delle banalità. C'era persino un po' di concorrenza tra di loro. Al contrario di quello che insegnava loro Gesù, ambivano di essere il primo, il più grande del gruppo. Una cosa, tuttavia, è certa: tutti sono stati attirati dallo

stesso Gesù, il quale, in tempi diversi e in circostanze diverse, ha rivolto a ciascuno di essi lo stesso invito: "Vieni e seguimi!". Questo è ciò che li univa. Per questi uomini così diversi tra loro Gesù ha pronunciato, al termine della sua vita, la preghiera rivolta al Padre: «Siano perfetti nell'unità» (Gv 17,23). È a loro che Gesù ha affidato tutto sé stesso, le sue parole, i suoi fatti, la sua missione e, in un certo senso, il suo futuro: «Andate e fate discepoli tutti i popoli» (Mt 28,19); con la forza dello Spirito «di me sarete testimoni ... fino ai confini della terra» (At 1,8).

Egli si è fidato del gruppo dei discepoli, si fida di noi, uomini e donne semplici, e sa che fin quando rimaniamo fedeli a lui, centro di unità, le diversità contribuiscono a rendere più belle, più ricche e più dinamiche le nostre comunità, e più efficace la nostra attività missionaria.



(Gift from Orbis Books to Sedos Library)

Mary L. Gautier, Ph.D

International Sisters in the United States

Lessons We Have Learned



Our study is the first ever national study of international women religious (i.e., religious sisters and nuns) conducted in the United States. Funded by the GHR Foundation, researchers from Trinity Washington

University and from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University collaborated to design and implement the research. For the purpose of this study, an “international sister” is a woman religious who was born outside the United States and is now living in the United States, in ministry, in study, or in residence here. This study uses the term “religious institute” to refer to any religious congregation, order, province, region, or monastery with separate governance.

There is no list of inter-national sisters in the United States, so we first had to find them. Our study was conducted in 2015 and 2016 and involved three pieces of research. We first sent a brief survey to over 500 U.S. based institutes of women religious and asked them for the names of their international sisters. These superiors gave us the names of 1,678 international sisters. We also contacted the Vicar for Religious in all U.S. dioceses and asked them for the names of international sisters working in their diocese. This request gave us another 1,866 non-duplicated international sisters. In all, we located over 4,000 international sisters in the United States, who we then surveyed for the second part of this project. The third piece of research included 26 interviews and focus groups with some of these international sisters, to learn from them

in their own words about the challenges and rewards of their experience. The breadth of diversity of the sisters surveyed and interviewed gives a sense of the dynamism of the international dimension of women’s religious life.

Findings from the Institute Survey

Remember, almost half of the international sisters we located were identified to us by their religious institute. So, what can these institutes tell us about the international sisters that are living in the United States? According to their major superiors, nearly half of their international sisters came to the United States first and then entered religious life within the United States. A similar proportion entered religious life first and then came to the United States as international sisters. Just 5 percent transferred to a U.S. institute from another religious institute outside the United States.

Some of these U.S. religious institutes offer hospitality or support to individual international sisters from other institutes by hosting them while they are in the United States for study or ministry. It is expected that these international sisters will not stay in the United States but will return to their home country when their study or ministry is completed. Among institutes that have hosted international sisters, about four in ten had at least one international sister who had contacted them from abroad with a request to live with them for a time. About a third had at least one international sister who had contacted them from within the United States with a similar request. Very few had been contacted by a diocese with a request for hospitality for an international sister and just two percent had a sister who just showed up without prior contact or notification.

What sort of support do these U.S. institutes offer to international sisters who are living in the United States? The most common type of support is housing, followed by spiritual support, education, and transportation.

More than a third of major superiors say that their institute has provided immigration legal services to international sisters. About three in ten have provided language support, such as accent reduction or English as a Second Language (ESL). Three in ten have provided monetary support, such as financial aid for school, a stipend for ministry, or some type of employment. About one in five has provided mentoring or some type of support group and the same proportion have provided some other type of acculturation training. About one in ten has provided an interpreter or some sort of cultural liaison to international sisters.

Finally, the major superiors of the institutes said that what is most needed is to help the international sisters feel welcome and supported in the community. They emphasized that it was important for the U.S.-born sisters and the international sisters to understand each other's culture.

Findings from the International Sister Survey

In mid-2015, we mailed a survey, in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, to 3,544 international sisters who had been identified by religious institutes and diocesan vicars for religious. We distributed additional surveys at public presentations and through other organizations with access to international sisters. We received more than a thousand completed surveys from international sisters in 257 different religious institutes from more than 83 countries around the world.

In addition to the written surveys, over the course of a year we conducted 26 interviews and focus groups throughout the United States, with international sisters from 28 countries on five continents. Some of them came here as children or teens with their families, and entered religious life here. Most came as adults and either entered here

or came here already as sisters to study or work.

Each interview or focus group lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and centered around these four basic questions: 1) The experience of arriving in the United States, 2) The challenges they faced in living and working in the United States, 3) The contributions they make to religious life and ministry in the United States, and 4) Advice they have for future arrivals and those who would welcome them. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed to supplement the quantitative surveys.

Where are they from?

The sisters in this study come from 83 countries across six continents. Asia is the largest sending continent, and Oceania the smallest. One in three responding international sisters was born in one of the Asian nations. Among the Asian international sisters, Vietnam accounts for 44 percent of the international sisters, the Philippines 24 percent, and India 23 percent. Among European sending nations, Ireland accounts for 41 percent, Poland 18 percent and Italy 10 percent. North America is represented by Mexico, which sent 79 percent of the sisters, and Canada with 21 percent.

From Africa, 38 percent of the sisters are from Nigeria, 16 percent from Uganda, over 10 percent from Kenya, and 10 percent from Tanzania. From Central/South America, the four largest sending countries are Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru. And from Oceania, 71 percent of the sisters come from Australia and 14 percent from Samoa.

What was their pathway to the United States?

Almost 40 percent of responding international sisters entered their current institute outside the United States and then were sent to the United States for ministry. Twenty-eight percent came to the United States before entering religious life. Thirteen percent entered their current

institute outside the United States, then were sent to the United States for study. Ten percent were sent to the United States for religious formation.

A smaller number came to the United States via other ways. Six percent transferred to a U.S. province of their institute from another province outside the United States. Two percent transferred to their institute in the United States from another institute outside the United States. Finally, 2 percent came to the United States in order to enter religious life.

Who are these international sisters?

On average, these international sisters are 58 years old, much younger than the typical U.S. born sisters. Nearly all of them are in active ministry and only one in ten are over age eighty and most likely no longer in active ministry. On average, they entered religious life at age 23 and entered the United States at age 30. They have been serving in the United States for an average of 27 years.

About a third of responding international sisters identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander. Another third identifies as European, Canadian, or Australian. One fifth identifies as Latin American/Mexican. And one in ten identifies as African or Afro-Caribbean.

Can they handle the English language?

Seventy percent of the responding international sisters are fluent or native in English language skills, most often the European or African sisters. International sisters from Latin America and from Asia are less likely to be fluent in English and to need assistance in acquiring English proficiency. Of course, those whose native language is English as well as those who have English as a secondary language taught in the schools of their country are more likely to have English proficiency. And the longer international sisters stay in the United States, the more fluently they master the English language.

What is their level of education?

The responding international sisters are highly educated. More than seven in ten

earned an undergraduate or graduate degree. More than one in ten completed some college and another 2 percent have a trade school or technical school certificate. Just over one in ten has completed only secondary school or less.

What are their current ministries?

Eighty-five percent of the respondents are in active ministry. Of those, 21 percent serve in parish/diocesan/ethnic group ministry. Twenty percent serve in hospital/health care ministry. Fifteen percent serve in education, with 1 percent serving in campus ministry. Fourteen percent are students. Thirteen percent serve their institutes in leadership, vocation and formation work. Nine percent serve in social service ministry, and 5 percent are contemplatives living in monasteries. Three percent responded as serving in other ministries, most of which are spiritual direction or retreats.

What do these international sisters tell us?

As I mentioned above, in addition to the rich data from the survey of international sisters, we also conducted 26 interviews or focus groups with 75 international sisters. We analyzed all that qualitative data and have distilled from it some important lessons that can help those who leave their homeland to do the Lord's work as well as those who welcome them and seek to support them in their lives and ministries. Here are some of our findings, summarized by us and illustrated by the words of the sisters themselves.

Welcoming international sisters: culture shock or homecoming?

Although they may seem comparatively trivial, the daily practical problems in adjusting to the different food, weather, and language of their new home loom large in the experiences of the international sisters in the focus groups. By far the most common difficulty mentioned was with becoming comfortable with the language. One sister told us: "My problem was English language. I could understand nothing. And I was

worried about how long it would be like that. But after a few months, I just started catching the words and I started to understand the whole sentences. Of course, I went to community college. And every day, I went there to learn English.”

Even the sisters from countries where English was a common language found adjusting to American English difficult, whether because of the unfamiliar accent or the speed at which Americans speak. Said one sister: “So actually, we learned American English from the kids. And then when we spoke in English in the beginning, they asked us ‘are you speaking in Spanish?’. Actually, we spoke English in India as we learned it there. So, they did not know the accent.”

Another sister told us: “In my country, we don’t speak English. We speak English in school, but we don’t use it. We use our mother tongue, which is Swahili. So, at first it was very hard for me to speak English. We spoke British English. And here it is American English.”

But the sisters also told us that surmounting this challenge was made easier by the sisters who welcomed them to the United States. Said one: “I thought I knew English. But when I came here, the difficulty was the diction was different and I was not understood. And I did not understand them. Luckily one sister was compassionate and said, ‘OK, every weekend, you come here and we will teach you.’” Another said: “The language is difficult – it’s still difficult sometimes, but the key is if you are open to learn new things, it’s always provided. And I did receive a lot of support from the community.”

Other practical difficulties involved adjusting to the food and the weather in the United States. One sister described it this way: “The most difficult thing I found when I came to the U.S. was the food, because I lived in the residence. And the food was the hospital food. So, the first two weeks, I ate green apples, so I lost a lot of pounds. I did not

want the food except some corn in the hospital. That was the only thing I would eat.” Another told us: “That was the first time in my life I saw snow. It was in 1964, I had not seen snow in my whole life and I thought I would freeze to death.”

And it was not just the unfamiliar food that was a problem, but also unfamiliar customs involved in preparing and eating it: One sister told us: “Eating in the morning by myself, eating lunch by myself and seeing people only in the morning and evening was hard because it is very different than what we had at home. There, we prepared breakfast together and everybody would eat. Somebody would make the food, somebody made the coffee and we prepared everything together and ate together. Lunch the same thing, dinner the same thing. So, everybody, especially for meals, we worked together.

For many, especially for those who had been sent to the United States alone to study, being so far from friends, family and the rest of their congregation meant that they had to deal with loneliness. For the sisters who came as a group sent to establish a house of their institute in this country, on the other hand, loneliness was less of a problem. One sister said: “When Mother asked me to go work in the U.S., it was hard to leave the country, the family, and the sisters. But I came here, we had five sisters here already, so seeing the five sisters here, I felt like I was with the sisters in my community. I had a very blessed experience coming here for the first time. And they treated me exactly like I was at my motherhouse back in India. So, I did not feel much homesick the first time. But my family had so many struggles leaving me this far away.”

Satisfaction with Aspects of Life in the United States

Almost all of the international sisters reported to us in their survey responses that they were satisfied with their housing, food, health care, and transportation. They told us that they were satisfied with the support they receive from the sisters in their local house,

from their institute, from their family, and from their diocese. One sister told us: “I was welcomed when I came to the United States. They tried to help me always. They gave me so much courage. They made me feel very good.”

We learned though, particularly through the focus groups and interviews, that coming to live and work in another country brings with it many challenges, even in the best of circumstances. One sister told us how nervous she was in the face of all the strangeness she encountered. She said: “My self-confidence was not very high when I first entered the United States. I don’t know if it was connected to being in a new country. In my feelings, it was like, ‘I can’t do this right; I can’t do that right.’”

Even in their ministry and in their spiritual life, the sisters related to us some of the challenges they faced in trying to fit in to a new culture. Said one sister: “In my country, we sisters had a place that we called the chapel and it’s especially for prayer. You can go there to do your personal prayer and your community prayer. When I got here, we had to pray in the living room, and I said, ‘Where is the chapel?’ That was very hard for me to get used to.” Another told us: “In my country, we had a big group so you can share: you go into ministry and you share your ministry together. Nowadays, here, they do it differently, you are just alone. Maybe you are lucky and you have another companion but they live in another house and not close by.”

Many times, these sisters tell us that they had difficulty adapting to different cultural assumptions, in their relationships with U.S. sisters as well as in their relationships with their sisters back home. One sister told us of an unfortunate experience she observed in her community: “I think of the first Vietnamese sister that we had. She was coming to look at transferring into our community. I remember she had barely been there a week or two. And I remember she came over to me in tears. And what it was, she had picked up her bowl like this to eat her rice, soup, or whatever it was. And one of

the American sisters slapped her hand, and said, ‘In our culture, we do not eat it that way,’ and ‘It is rude,’ and all that stuff.”

The biggest challenges for most of these international sisters are learning how to fit in, to feel comfortable in another culture. They have to learn to live and speak in another language, even if that means taking a step back to go back to school. One sister told us: “I had already finished college in my country, but when I arrived here I had to start everything over from square one. I had to go back to school to learn everything again, and the language is hard.” They are regularly misunderstood when they try to communicate, which can be humbling and humiliating. They make mistakes, even when they are trying very hard to fit in.

Loneliness is a big challenge for these sisters, even though they are nearly all living in community. One sister told us of her feeling of isolation in these words: “One thing is I don’t have my own community here. I am the only one that is here, so I live in a different community with sisters, and they are very nice so far. But I am so used to living with my own community of sisters because community life there is so much different from here and we are so community bonded in terms of prayer life and community life and apostolic life. So, the community life is better there.”

Another very difficult challenge for international sisters, and one which we had not really anticipated, is how to maintain their involvement with their congregation back home and participate in the life of their institute. Nearly three in five told us that they are at least somewhat concerned about this. This is much more than simple loneliness, it has to do with a sense of responsibility to their sending community as well as a feeling of isolation or alienation from them. Said one sister: “I feel very responsible because, being alone, I have so much burden on my shoulders in terms of the ministry here. My leadership team has such high expectations for me and because I am here alone, I have to stay on track.”

But this is not a story only of difficulties encountered and challenges overcome. The international sisters are truly a blessing and a gift to the church in the United States. They bring an international awareness to sisters who have been for too long inward-looking and culturally closed off. Said one sister: “I know one thing that I notice we international sisters bring to the United States: we bring an awareness of a new person coming to our congregation from another country, who needs a helping hand, needs someone to walk with them and tell them some of the things that we found out the hard way.” Another sister spoke of how having international sisters encouraged the U.S. sisters to learn a second language: “We were at an international gathering of sisters last month. There were Egyptians, Haitians, Cameroonians, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. Seven languages, can you imagine, at one table? It gives us more perseverance to learn another language, like I have English and Spanish, and some of the others, it’s amazing—some of them speak three or four languages!”

The international sisters also bring a diversity in prayer and worship styles to the United States, which deepens and enriches the experience for all. One sister told us: “I do home health care, and the family that I work with are Catholics, but they don’t understand what the rosary is all about. I taught them the rosary. They are wonderful people because they see me always with my rosary. When I work there, I sit down and continue my rosary. They are happy now that they enjoy the rosary, so I gave them the rosary.”

Perhaps the greatest gift that the international sisters bring to the church in the United States, though, is the gift of intercultural understanding. Said one sister: “I think the richness of international sisters is not only for the community but also for the Church. I think the difference in the Church now is its diversity, and as a diverse group we offer different stages and so people might open different eyes to see; we see things in different ways. I think we give a lot of

richness to the Church and to the community.” Finally, one sister described how the presence of sisters from Africa is making it possible for her congregation to thrive: “You see, my congregation is on the verge of revitalization at this point and I think that would not be happening without sisters coming from Africa to add to the sisters here, to our number, because we are not getting more vocations here from the United States, for my congregation. So, I feel that the sisters coming from Africa are also contributing somehow to the congregation to go on, to move ahead.”

Implications and Recommendations from the Research

We are particularly sensitive to the many and difficult challenges that international sisters, along with all newcomers to the United States, face in a new society, and especially one as complex as this country. In the course of our research, we discovered that there is not just one story, there are many stories. Individual sisters told stories of dealing with spiritual and cultural differences—like different liturgical styles and different food and weather—and with emotional issues, especially loneliness. They spoke of problems with some U.S.-born sisters and laity who did not always welcome them and of problems with some religious superiors and clergy, sometimes even from their home country. They had to adjust to a more individualistic society, with more bureaucracy, credentialing, and criminal background checks, even involving ministry, a startling change for some of them. They had to adjust to a pluralistic society of many religions and ethnic groups, to a huge Catholic Church with hundreds of dioceses and religious institutes and a variety of parish and diocesan cultures, and to a religious life of multiple ministries and different charisms. In the midst of this, they share in the multiple political and social challenges facing the millions of immigrants in this country at this time. Thus, their collective identity is a complex one, and one that is too often hidden in plain sight. While

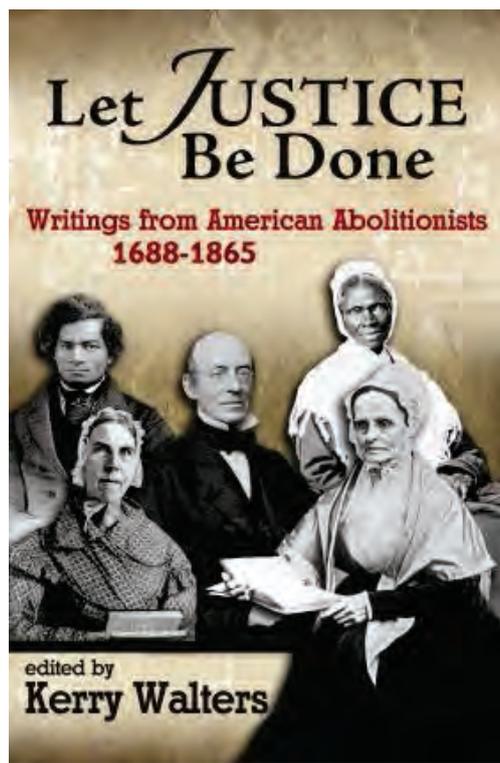
the resiliency shown by the sisters is inspiring, the need for the Church and the people of the United States to grow in understanding the challenges of migration is urgent. As Pope Francis reminded us in his visit to the United States in 2015, we are a nation of immigrants. We can also say that we have been and still are a Church of immigrants.

These international sisters in the United States are part of the complex migration patterns that circle the world at this time. While a century ago, many European sisters left their home countries to serve in the Americas, Asia and Africa, and while we know that today sisters in Asia, Africa and Latin America are sent to serve in North America and Europe, we also realize that the picture is more complex than a simple reversal of mission. Sisters from the North and South cross paths, creating new patterns of international relationship and ministry that have the potential for even greater collaboration and effective-ness in ministry, and a renewed energy for the building up of religious life and the Church, in even greater service to the world.

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While the primary focus of our research was on institutes and sisters, we learned of organizations, networks and structures that have been developed or are evolving in response to the needs and contributions of international sisters. More research needs to be done on the growth and development of organizations like these so that ideas can be exchanged as new needs emerge and solutions evolve. We wrote a book, *Migration for Mission*, that provides more details from these qualitative and quantitative data, along with more description of the networks and structures being developed by and for international sisters, in order to provide a more accurate understanding of the many dimensions of religious life in this country today. We recommend that book as a resource for those who are struggling to deal with diversity in religious life. We are grateful to the GHR who funded the study, to all who supported us in our work, and, finally, to the witness of the extraordinary international sisters of today who follow in the long line of sisters across centuries and nations who left their home country to minister in a new land, for a short while or forever, for the sake of the Gospel.

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Formation and Accompaniment of Formators



In this talk I am not dealing with our academic training of priest and religious. Many efforts have been put into that to produce a very high standard of

academic work.

However, I would like to refer to the Vatican II document on priestly formation where it clearly states that all seminary staff should take part in courses of special institutes of a pedagogical nature which would prepare them better for their work. Reading the document, I felt the type of institute they were thinking of, did not exist, and when Cardinal Hume as my boss mentioned to me: “Do something different from what is being done,” I founded the Institute of St. Anselm under his auspices with a very different approach, with stress on the development of the leadership and formation personality. Our courses became process-orientated to help people to personalize what they have learnt in their academic subjects.

I am focusing, this morning, on the people who are specially appointed to be formators in seminaries and religious formation. My conviction is that we need to invest more personnel with better and longer formation for those people who are involved in the most delicate work of accompanying students and candidates. We would need more qualified staff of this nature who are able to accompany their students on their bio-psycho-spiritual journey on a deep level. That investment will pay off through more relational and more effective priests and religious who are better equipped to bring about a deep renewal of our congregations and church by fostering deep and authentic faith in those entrusted to them.

Supervision is a common practice in the therapeutic world. The church prefers the term of accompaniment. Accompanying formators by a properly trained person will improve the quality of formation work. A person who accompanies a formator needs to have much more experience in the field of accompanying people. As I explain what formation means in 2022, it becomes clearer what kind of experience such a person needs to have.

For several decades we have reflected what our formation of priests and religious should be like. Many good suggestions were mentioned. I just mention some of them. There needs to be a focus on sexual and emotional development. It has to be more pastoral and practical. Relationships should be at the centre of formation. Candidates and students need to be trained to be more responsible with money, use of time, telephones and general behaviour. There is a great need to help them to develop a deep spirituality.

In these discussions, the focus was very much on personal formation. After the Synod on priestly formation, a bishop who had taken part in the Synod came on our course and told me: “Every day we were asking the question who will train the formators. Here I see you are doing exactly that.” Formation and vocation work are priorities for the church and every religious congregation. I am convinced that any money spent to train formators, vocation directors and leaders is the best investment for the church and society. Renewal in the church and in society can only come about by personal renewal of individuals. I started with the renewal of leaders and formators.

Primary formation and ongoing formation are the best places to achieve renewal. Both need essential changes. We have focused in

our formation mainly on content, input. Now we need to focus in addition to that on process, on personalizing the input. That is where redemption, maturing and growth come about. Knowledge is one essential aspect, however applying this to our lives is the second essential aspect which needs much more attention than we have given it.

I have taught people process work and deep process work for many years now. One of my principles is that what I teach I try to practice myself. Lots of what I teach comes from my personal experience. Formators need to go through a process of growth and renewal. Obviously, Jesus wants us to have a full life. The only way to participate fully in our lives is to use our bodies, brains, feelings, intuition, awareness, thoughts, our spiritual faculties and our unconscious, by using tools to bring it to consciousness, in other words all our faculties-mind, body, and spirit.

How many faculties of the above list have been developed in our priestly and religious formation? A too strong emphasis on thinking and leading with our brain has led to a disembodiment of our knowing. This led to a distortion of our knowledge. It also led to an inability to receive and understand a large portion of information that was actually available to us. We are not operating on all cylinders. We are not using a vast amount of the information and knowledge of which we are capable.

What is this new formation all about?

It is about our inner process. In our formation we have strongly focused on information, on content. Obviously, that was important and is still important. However, most people are not able to translate that content into their own personal lives. They learn to know what they should do, but they do not know ‘**how**’ to do it, ‘**how**’ to personalise the knowledge they have learned. This new approach does not replace what has been done so far, but adds on something which is only being done

embryonically, if at all, in the formation most of us experienced.

In our old paradigm which is based on physics and which is part of our scientific thinking, because of its very nature we become alienated from ourselves, from others, from the environment and from God, self-centered, materialistic, mechanistic, agnostic or atheistic, and static in our thinking. The old paradigm has brought many good things, the whole technological development, but at the same time due to many factors we have lost essential aspects of who we are as human beings and have become directionless.

The new paradigm and new formation are essentially process-orientated. “*Panta rei*”. Everything is in flow. We are in process; we are not static. The new formation is process-orientated. People learn how to live in the present moment and how-to live-in process in daily life. They become aware of their emotions, their sexuality, their beliefs, their needs, their values. They learn to challenge themselves to live according to their Christian values by facing their lived values, unredeemed emotions, unredeemed belief systems and need systems, and replacing them with Christian values, redeemed emotions, redeemed beliefs and needs. They also learn to deal with deep processes which pop up in all kind of forms like hurts, unforgiveness, loss experiences and many other unredeemed emotions.

Living in process reconnects us with self, others, the environment and God. Without these connections, we cannot live a wholistic life, to which God has called us. “I have come so that you may have life abundantly”. The new formation teaches us how-to live-in process and how to teach others to live in their process. It will take time to achieve this because of the deep processes that will come up and need to be worked through and because we all come from a society of the physical paradigm which is not suitable for psychology and theology.

We are all influenced by the effects of the old paradigm. It is not surprising that many people have given up their faith, because it is alien to the values of the old paradigm: money, power, control and matter. These values are constantly put before us. We understand now that young people find it difficult to see any meaning in religious life or even priesthood. Therefore, they need accompaniment to find the values of the Gospel meaningful to lead a fulfilled life. For this to achieve, the person who accompanies them needs to be happy and needs to express that happiness in his/her whole being. They may be happy in themselves, but their non-verbal communication may not show that.

The essential aspect of the new formation is that it reconnects us with the great mystery of the blessed Trinity as our model, inspiration and strength. It leads us into the eternal process of the self-giving love of God the Father to the Son in the Holy Spirit. Through baptism we are taken into the community life of the Trinity and through the frequent participation in the Eucharist we slowly become divinized and healed from our woundedness. In this way, at the end of time, Christ will reign over everything and everybody and hand his kingdom over to God the Father.

The new formation shows us in detail how this process needs to unfold by dealing with our emotions, sexuality, values, wounds, beliefs and needs. At the same time, it clearly explains who is suitable and who is not suitable for religious life and priesthood. If students or candidates do not want to enter this process, they are not suitable for religious life or priesthood, because they do not want to become part of the trinitarian community.

Why do leaders and formators need to be properly trained in this new formation?

Obviously, if we want a deep renewal in the church and society, it must start with the leaders and formators, to be effective. A few

people have gone through this process in spite of the old paradigm and its values. Most people, however, need to find the values of the Christian faith as worthwhile to spend all one's energy for building up God's kingdom in themselves and others. They have taken in the values of society in which they grew up. They need to discover the new, true Christian values. This takes time and they need capable and properly trained people to accompany them in their bio-psycho-spiritual journey towards union with God.

Moreover, there is a great lack of maturity in our younger generation due to the exposure to so many stimuli which take time to digest. However, that time is not available, because new information reaches them constantly through their phones and computers.

Good, solid Christian families have become a rarity. In former times, solid faith foundations were established in the family prayer life and their Christian values, attitudes acquired in the family and lively parish celebrations.

Due to many circumstances people in our time, particularly because of family breakdown and lately because of corona virus have undergone deep wounds, which are in need of healing.

Candidates for priestly and religious life need much more accompaniment, which leads to bio-psycho-spiritual healing.

All kinds and forms of addictive behaviour such as the perpetual use of phones have become part of people's life. Most people are not even aware of their addictions. This makes living in the presence of God difficult. It makes it impossible to acquire deep faith which is necessary for priestly and religious vocations. Another addiction is money which often leads to monetary abuse.

Now I go into details of why we need to train our leaders and formators properly. These are just a few general statements.

Young people especially, but people in general need role models. We see this particularly in sports.

When I was president of the Missionary Institute London, an international training centre for missionaries of seven missionary societies, not seldom students said to me: “I don’t want to become a priest like this lecturer”. If we want more religious and priestly vocations, we have to invest the best members in formation. Formation in our time is much more demanding than decades before. They need to be good in establishing healthy relationships and they need to have acquired a deep spirituality.

1. To learn to live in process and to do deep process work are new skills which we need to learn, which were not part of our own formation.

Present leaders and formators could acquire these two skills through workshops which could be arranged according to demands. For future leaders and formators the Institute of St. Anselm has already developed these training programs. They are based on my personality model which is wholistic and in which the spiritual formation is right at the centre of the process. I have always tried to develop the leadership and formation personality in my programs starting with input on the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. These lectures are practical, so that one can easily apply the input to one’s personal life. In fact, this first lecture contains all the other elements of the program in embryonic form. At the centre of it is the self-giving love of God, particularly shown in the creation, incarnation and in the self-giving of Jesus on the cross and Eucharist. God’s love is the model for our love. God’s self-giving is the model for our self-giving.

Through living daily in process and doing deep process work we learn the self-giving love. We no longer remain products of the old paradigm which fostered self-centeredness and individualism. The process work helps us to acquire the Christian values which we know from Sacred Scripture. Since we live under the strong pressure of the old paradigm, living in daily process is a necessity to survive as authentic Christians.

In this daily living process, we connect with the Blessed Trinity which lives in us and we work together with the Holy Spirit to heal and divinize our frail and wounded human nature. To do this daily gives our life much purpose and enthusiasm. I enjoy every day in spite of all restrictions and many inconveniences. Life is exciting and a great gift from God. I become more enthusiastic every day, in spite of my aging process.

Life is so excitable, because I discover new things of my personal history nearly every day. This gives me a chance to integrate my past life with my present life and make sure that past negative experiences are properly worked through and become assets for my future Life. In this way my life becomes richer every day. This is what living in process and doing deep inner process work does to me. I experience more and more God’s guidance and illuminations in my life. Leaders and formators need to be enthusiastic and full of life and joy. Through this process work anybody can achieve that, because it brings us in deep contact with God on a daily basis by establishing more and more God’s kingdom in ourselves.

2. We need a clear vision for our formation in our time. Pope Francis has provided us with this new vision in his simple statements of “smelling the sheep”.

I interpret “smelling the ship” with being close to the people entrusted to our care. For many priests and religious this request to be close to those entrusted to them is very difficult. They may be shy or are afraid of men or women or authority figures. Thus, their ministry suffers. From my experience over many years, these emotions of shyness and fear are very common. As we help them to deal with their shyness or fear, they start enjoying human relationships with people of whom they had been afraid before.

It is a great pity that this help was not given to them during the years of formation. Many years of their ministry were much less effective than they could have been, if they would have had an effective formation. This

is what they say to me often, after they have worked through certain woundedness from childhood. We need to be able to enjoy the company of those who are entrusted to us and ‘smell’ them.

Many people have authority problems. They are afraid of authority and act this out with their authority figures in the parish and often with their bishops. This could have been worked through during the years of formation. These authority problems cause a lot of waste of energy, which could be used for positive purposes. Parishioners often tolerate such priests because they are priests, however, they are not models of a Christian way of relating. Many of these people are not even aware that there is a problem on their part, but blame the parishioners or the authorities.

3. I was pleased to read on the 10 of May 2021 in the interview with Cardinal Stella:

“A seminary is a “laboratory” where not only the intellect is formed, but especially the heart, every fibre of the person that is human prior to being Christian, of men called to become pastors of souls.”

Frequently in my lectures I have said “this course is a “laboratory”. I like the stress on the heart. Very often the emotional formation is still very much neglected. It is not enough to give academic lectures on emotions. The first step with dealing with emotions is to help people to become aware of their emotions. Many people are not aware of their emotions. Two years ago, a participant asked me: “What are emotions?” He was destined to be in charge of formation. He said that he had never heard of emotions.

4. Leaders and formators need to be able to help those entrusted to them to be able to forgive and to be reconciled which is a central aspect of Christian living.

Sticking to our own opinion is just another addiction and the cause of many conflicts. Conflicts are unavoidable and part of community life, leadership and formation.

Many conflicts arise from intra-psychic conflicts. The more leaders deal with their own intra-psychic conflict the fewer conflicts they will encounter in interpersonal relationship.

Leaders and formators need to be experts in forgiving and helping others to forgive the hurts which are or were inflicted upon them. Many priests and religious who have been hurt carry these wounds for years and years. Every Christian would need to become an expert in forgiving. There is a tremendous need to teach and model for people how to forgive. Jesus is our model and has taught us that we need to forgive again and again. There is a difference between forgiving as an intention and emotional forgiveness. Leaders and formators need to be taught to forgive emotionally. That is true forgiveness.

Leaders and formators need to learn to forgive and to be reconciled where possible. Hot emotions will be thrown at them and therefore, they need to become emotionally robust. They need to learn to deal with their emotions constructively. They need to learn to be proactive and not reactive.

5. In the last decades we became familiar not only with IQ, but also with EQ and with SQ.

EQ or emotional intelligence was very much introduced into the business world, because they became aware that people with a high IQ are not as effective as people with a high EQ. Later SQ (spiritual intelligence) came into the picture. What do we develop in our formation programs? In most programs we still develop mainly IQ and some SQ. IQ is extremely important for universities and therefore needs to be fostered for further developments on all levels.

For practical life EQ development is essential together with SQ. SQ gives us the direction in which to move in our personal and daily living situations. SQ can lack the “groundedness” which we need in our daily living. EQ development provides us with these insights. In our formation we are still a long way off from finding the right balance between the three types of intelligences to

produce the best formation for our candidates to priesthood and religious life.

My experience is that many have acquired a high IQ. But are lacking in EQ and applied SQ. Therefore, wisely the document on priestly formation mentions that seminary staff should go to Institutes (like St. Anselm's) to acquire more EQ and even practical SQ.

6. A skill which is essential for leader and formators is “caring confrontation”.

It sounds very simple and easy. That is what I thought, too, until I discovered that people who I thought could do it, were completely unable to do it, because they had serious problems with any confrontation. On the other hand, some people did it in a way which was anything else but caring. These are the two extremes. Some people need a lot of time to work through their problems, their fears with confrontation. Others need to work through their anger which goes into confrontation and makes confrontation a destructive process.

Caring confrontation is the tool for psycho-spiritual growth. One of the main purposes of formation and leadership is to help people in their psycho-spiritual journey towards union with God, which is the main purpose of every human being whether they know it or not, but particularly of priests and religious.

7. Leaders and formators need to have a good amount of self-awareness.

What is going on in myself at this moment? What are my thoughts? What are my expectations? What are my feelings? Are they positive or negative? Am I angry, disappointed, fearful? How do these emotions affect what I am going to do? How does it affect my decisions which I have to make today? How does it affect my relationships with people?

Am I optimistic about the future of my congregation? Am I overworked? Am I in too much stress? How can I deal with these situations? Am I constantly irritated? What do I do about that? Am I a Christian example to the people entrusted to me? What is

happening to my faith and prayer Life? Have I got a deep relationship with Christ? Do I keep on fostering it in spite of my workload? What are my expectations of my students? Are these expectations reasonable? Are they too high? These are just somethings of which I need to be aware and do something about it, if I see it is necessary or good for the benefit of those entrusted to me or even for my benefit.

Awareness is the first step of change and growth. The awareness how we come across to others may invite us to change our behaviour. Often others notice our negative behaviour and can give us feedback, if we elicit it.

Living in the present moment, living in the presence of God, living in process will help us enormously to become aware of what is going on in us.

8. Leaders and formators need deep faith.

Without deep faith we cannot enjoy our ministry as leaders and formators. It is essential that we enjoy our ministry. Without joy our ministry is dead. Deep faith gives tremendous meaning to our life. We all need to have meaning in our lives. Particularly, priests and religious have reason to search for deep meaning in their ministry.

Our society needs help to become reconnected with God. Many people are alienated from God. To achieve this, they need to be reconnected with their bodies, their feelings, their deepest values. This is healing work which happens when people learn to live in process. It happens through establishing a living relationship with God and healthy relationships with people.

Deep faith is a great gift from God, but also a responsibility to share this gift with others who may be struggling or even despair, who have not had the opportunity to develop such deep faith.

9. Leaders and formators need great confidence.

This confidence will come out of deep faith and working to develop a healthy self-esteem. Many people lack a healthy self-esteem due to negative experiences in childhood. Often, I have seen how some people grew enormously into a healthy self-confidence during the course. If I have a deep faith and see that as an asset for my living, this experience will provide the confidence to share it with the people entrusted to me. People pick up very quickly whether a leader or formator is confident. If they are not, some people take advantage and abuse such a formator or leader who then turns often into an authoritarian leader and formator.

10. Leaders and formators need to be aware of the difference of the values of our society and the Christian values.

We live in a multicultural, secularized world and are constantly influenced by the values of our society which partly are opposed to our Christian values. Therefore, leaders and formators need to be skilled to do value clarification for themselves and those entrusted to them. How can they live a Christian life, if their values are much the same as the values of society? How can they bear witness to the Risen Lord?

We have an enormous task in Europe and other countries to proclaim the values of the Risen Lord and bring about a necessary renewal of the church and slowly of society. One way to achieve this is to train our leaders and formators in a thorough and personalized way. They need to become mystics in action.

What about charity? Are our religious communities built on charity or the values of society-I am important; I want to be the centre of community; I need to be consulted in every change which takes place in community. Who is at the centre of our religious communities? Who is at the centre of our parishes? Who is at the centre of our

dioceses? Where is Christ in all this? Is it love that truly motivates us in our behaviours? Do we follow the path of Christ or of our society?

Value clarification is essential for each Christian, for each priest and religious. What are the values which I profess and what are the values by which I live? Are they the same?

11. Leaders and formators need to have a solid commitment to renewal of themselves, their congregation or diocese and the church and society as a whole.

Much contamination of our psyches and souls has taken place over the last decades in our society. We priest and religious and our candidates for priesthood and religious life are part of that contamination. We all need healing. Prayer alone will not achieve that. We need to cooperate with the healing work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. We know this from the Bible, but do we really relate to the indwelling Trinity or is it just a doctrine we know about?

Renewal can only be achieved if many individuals take it seriously to follow Christ on a daily basis and help others to do the same. In that process they will experience what Christ has promised us: "My burden is light", but also "take up your cross". This daily work of building up God's kingdom in us on a daily basis makes each day precious and meaningful.

This renewal work involves particularly our emotions. It means learning to use our emotions constructively. In our courses we spend much time to teach students to do this exciting work. I cannot describe the whole renewal work in this talk. My purpose of this talk is to show us how important it is to train leaders and formators according to this new method by giving much attention to our emotions and good, constructive communication.

12. Much of the work of formators and leaders will be accompaniment.

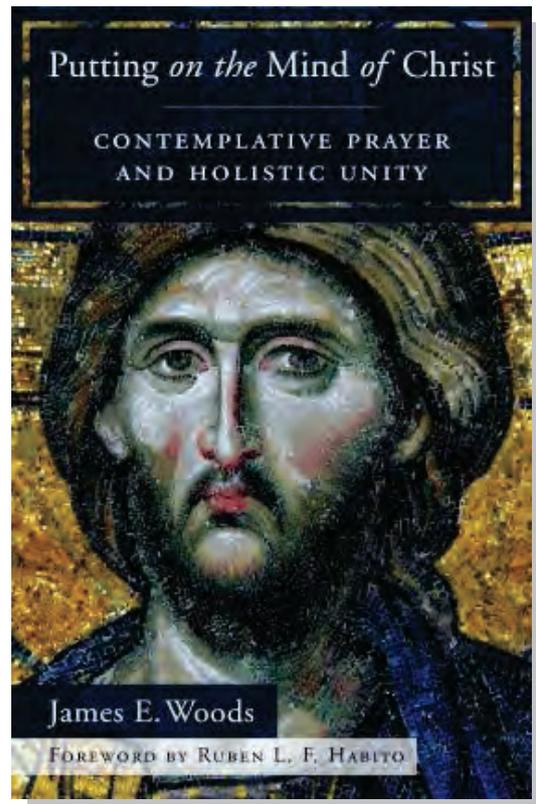
This work demands adequate training in living in process and deep process work besides acquiring helping skill. It often means accompanying them in their psycho-spiritual journey which requires great understanding of what this psycho-spiritual journey is. It is not just prayer and meditation. It often means removing obstacles in this process such as hurts, unforgiveness, bitterness, authority problems, unfinished loss experiences and many more. To accompany people, we need to be very much aware of our own process. If we are not aware of what is going on inside us, we might become abusive and we would not even know that we are abusive. We would have no chance to remedy this situation. Abusive behaviour is very common. Not all abusive behaviour is a crime. All abusive behaviour is damaging ourselves -our psyches, souls-and others towards whom it is directed. This can be verbal abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, monetary abuse, or spiritual abuse. For example, are politicians aware of their monetary abuse by allowing firms to charge highly excessive prices for testing corona virus before flights?

As leaders and formators we need to be knowledgeable and observant to detect it and deal with it. Don't think for a moment that you do not belong to this category of abusers. During last year's course I noticed that I had been abusive to a participant in my reply to a passive aggressive statement he made. When I had become aware, I apologized to him. He, too, had been abusive to me in his statement, but was not aware of it. This is a whole area in which we all can grow and become better Christians and build up God's kingdom of justice and peace in ourselves and others.

All passive aggressive behaviour is abusive. However, most of it is unconscious. It is an area with which a leader and formator would need to be familiar. Pope Francis has mentioned several times the damaging effect of gossip. How common is it in our

communities? What do we do in our formation to help candidates to become aware of it and avoid it? It is very much against charity. Cynicism, sarcasm, coming late, forgetting things, gossip are just a few forms of passive aggressive behaviour. In our accompaniment we can help those entrusted to us, to become aware, so that they can work on themselves to avoid this type of destructive behaviour.

These are just some areas of the new formation in which we need to become experts as leaders and formators if we want to bring about a transformation in our personal life and in the life of people entrusted to us.



(Gift from Orbis Books to Sedos Library)

Emma Paloma, ICM

The “Why” of On-Going Formation

Ongoing Formation for Formators Long on the Job



Introduction

“I bow to the Divine in you and may our minds and hearts meet.”

Today I am asked to share on the topic:

Ongoing Formation of Formators who are already long on the job. I take my hat off to all of you who have continued to say “Yes” to accompany your Congregation’s new and younger members as they blaze their own paths. “Hatless” you see that my head’s pepper has given way to salt. I, too, have made the commitment to walk beside our ICM young ones from way back 1973, going through many invitations and cycles of growth.

Our plan for this hour is to look at WHY seasoned Formators are invited, called to grow further and the challenges inherent in the call. To help me do that, I will begin by sharing the movements of our planet Earth based on scientific study which truly fascinates me.

The first of earth’s movements is its ROTATION around its tilted axis. Second is its movement of REVOLUTION in its elliptical orbit around the sun. Third, the earth participates in the GALACTIC movement of our solar system in its orbit around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy. What has awed me is the absence of felt movement. Even though we perceive ourselves as stationary, we know that it is simply not true. We see the night giving way to day and the seasons giving way to each other. Periodically, we see meteorites and comets in our night skies. (For a few

moments, we imagine the unfelt yet real movements and dance with the Earth.)

Why the image? As formators I see us dancing in three different and simultaneous orbits like our planet. We shall see the *why*, the *how* and the *what* as we unfold the topic.

The WHY of On-Going Formation

We can get caught focusing on the *What* and *How* of formation, yet what is essential is the *Why*.

It was Simon Sinek who popularized the concept of *Why* in his first TED Talk in 2009. He gave the example of Apple computers, and Apple’s success over their competitors. They were just a computer company who had the same access to resources as other computer companies yet while their competitors focused primarily on the *what* and *how* of their products, Apple started with the *Why*. He said, “People don’t buy *what* you do, they buy *Why* you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe.”

Another example is the 2017 movie “Hidden Figures” which is based on the true story of three exceptional women in NASA who served as the brains behind one of the greatest human endeavors in history—to launch an astronaut into space and return him to earth safely. The *Why* was clear: to be the first to orbit the earth and beat the Russians in the Space Race.

From my experiences, the *Why*, the main purpose of Formation is: ***to experience the God Who calls and to respond to the call.*** This process involves the naming and purifying of one’s motivations and confirming the interface of one’s personal charism with the charism and spirituality of the Congregation. It is a lifelong process. The Formator’s role, then, is to create the

suitable atmosphere and permeable structure or “container” for those in formation to make the free decision to cooperate with God’s dream for them. The Formator accompanies the youth as Mentor and Friend in finding the *Why* and experience the joy of responding to their call.

To facilitate this, the Formator endeavors, of course, to understand and take into account the different contexts of formation, i.e. the person’s “inner reality,” “the world of those being formed,” and the global realities that affect all which is the “locus of mission.”

Let us go back to our planet’s triple movements and take it as an image of growth—our continued, on-going growth as Formators. The planet’s movements are happening simultaneously in its tilted axis, its elliptical orbit around the sun and in the galaxy. So, does the Formator move in his/her simultaneous personal, communal, and global invitations to growth.

Three-Tiered Movement of Growth

Let us begin by focusing on the locus of the first movement, the Personal Axis. The image is that of the Earth spinning on its axis.

To help those in formation, the Formator needs to be constantly aware (the *Why*) that “the best is still to come.” In this first level of movement, the Formator is growing towards his or her Real Self, is blossoming to his or her potentials, and is learning to humbly accept his or her limitations. She or he is moving towards true Generativity, Transcendence, and deep Gratitude for being God’s Beloved. This movement is a labor of love that is constant. It involves a constant and on-going deepening of relationships on at least three levels.

Relationship with True Self. The Formator makes friends with his or her Shadow and hope to recognize his or her egoic patterns and compulsions sooner rather than later. She celebrates her beauty, her goodness, her responses to the Spirit-at-work. He prioritizes his many loves and attractions and let’s go of what is not life-giving.

Relationship with God. The Formator recognizes God as the One who weaves the fabric of her being and of the whole Universe. He acknowledges that God trusts him, a loved sinner, to co-create in renewing the face of the Earth. Formators carve out time to be with God and to listen to the movements of their heart – either drawing them towards or away from God.

Relationship with the Congregation and the many people encountered in the work as a Religious-Missionary and as Formator.

Learning never stops. There are skills needed in Formation. Enhancing these skills, both “hard” and “soft” skills, is undeniable in the formation ministry. What are some of these skills?

Hard skills pertain to technological knowledge or abilities required for the ministry. While formators may train for these skills, many of them may be and are learned “on-the-job.”

- Spiritual Direction, Discernment, Mindfulness, Visioning, Processing, Critical Thinking
- Familiarity with Scripture
- Fundamentals of Psychology to help individuals and the group in their developmental processes: Psycho-Social, Psycho-Sexual, Psycho-Spiritual
- Evaluation of Content and Process of a Formation Program
- A “Good Nose” to ‘sniff’ and “sift” the bogus from the authentic
- Teaching to recognize and use “teachable moments” when they arise
- Ritual-Making. Because it is of value, we talk a bit about it.

Rituals serve as a bridge between our outer and inner worlds, between the profane and the sacred, and between the ordinary and the extraordinary. On many levels, rituals give our lives a sense of meaning and purpose. By engaging all of our senses through the use of ritual elements inherent in the ritual process, we are able to bypass the intellect in favour of our intuitive, instinctive knowing. Rituals help us balance the work of our outer and

inner lives and allow for the full expression of our soul and spirit.

Some examples would be lighting candles on occasions like birthdays or moments of discernment; floating paper boats or flying paper planes to ritualize letting go of something or starting anew; making and flying a kite concretizes rootedness while soaring to greater heights.

Soft skills on the other hand pertain to interpersonal or people skills. These are skills that help the formator to work with others.

- Listening, Speaking, Dialogue, Giving and Receiving Feedback
- Practicing Compassion which is knowing the real need of the person and then doing whatever it takes to respond to the need.
- Dealing with emotions; coping with stress
- Community-living dynamics, dealing with inevitable and multi-leveled Conflict situations which are caused by differing information, goals, strategies, values. Managing or living with conflicts in inter-generational and inter-cultural living
- Process of Forgiveness

The next focus is the second simultaneous movement in formation which is the Global Axis. It involves growing in the Communal, Social and Ecclesial realities of the World. The image is that of the earth revolving around the Sun.

Growth in this area means knowing the context of today's formation, the "world" of the new members, and their new ways of responding to God's call. It requires formators to trust, believe and support the young religious' hopes and dreams. Pope Francis describes this as "having a great heart for young people."

Growth in this area can happen through participating in the renewal of Religious Life, in understanding and witnessing to the dynamism of a vowed life, and deeply immersing in the Congregation's Charism. It means Pastoral presence in God's Mission among the Poor, with a special attention to Mother Earth, the new poor. It means

initiating and participating in the responses to the Environmental crisis. On the whole, it is witnessed as a growth in the love of God's people, the Church both local and universal.

And now for the third movement, which is on the Galactic Axis. The image is that of the Solar System orbiting around the center of the Milky Way which is being pulled towards Andromeda amidst the large-scale structure of the Universe. It is so easy to be bogged down by the mundane and the myopic. A broader, galactic perspective is needed so that Formators do not get lost.

What does it mean to grow as Citizens of the Cosmos? Growth in this regard will necessitate a new understanding in at least five areas:

1. New understanding and experiencing of Self.

Humans are a species whose genetic and cultural endowment carries 13.7 billion years of creativity. Human beings are the Universe come to self-awareness. "To become fully mature as a human person we must bring to life within ourselves the dynamics that fashioned the cosmos. We must become these cosmic dynamics and primordial powers in new human form. That is our task: to create the human form of the central powers of the cosmos." (Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon*)

2. New understanding of Creation, the Cosmos.

The beginning of a New Cosmology is available to us now which reveals creation as a "singular unfinished event." The new cosmology tells about the 13.7 billion evolving story of the Universe, tells about the nature of everything and humanity's place within the great scheme of things. It allows human beings to recover a sense of belonging and connectedness. The New Story can bring about conversion – in relationship with oneself, with other persons, with the Earth Community, and with God.

3. New understanding of and response to God.

Humanity is invited to take a “long and loving look” at evolutionary Creation. God will come to us with newness and depth when we can see God with new eyes. Here are some new images of God suggested by Fr. John Surette of Spirit Earth Ecological Center in Chicago

- God Within All: God is within everything in a vibrant, empowering way so each can move on to better forms.
- God, the HUMBLE Creator: God uses the way of evolution whereby creatures co-create with God. This dwelling in limited creatures and sharing with them God’s act of creation are expressions of God’s humility.
- God, Profoundly Faithful: God has committed himself to this creative process for 13.7 billion years! It is said that in God’s universe, breakdown is also breakthrough. And so, though our world may be in almost mortal throes now, we are not without hope. If we do our part, we will not only survive but even enter into greater life. We can trust the Universe because the dynamic of God’s faithfulness to its processes permeates it. So too, therefore, does God’s faithfulness permeate our individual lives.
- God, the Promise of More. At the Big Bang, the charged particles and energy contained the promise of atoms, and after million years of cooling, it happened. Atoms of hydrogen and helium contained the promise of stars and galaxies, and it happened. One of these stars contained the promise of our solar system – and it happened. Earth contained the promise of life – and it happened. Early life contained the promise of human life – and it happened. And humans—we contain the promise of becoming more than we are now – and it will happen! The evolving unfinished universe is essentially Promise. It is always more and more. And so, it is in our individual lives. Every stage of our

life is the fulfillment of the promise of more of our previous stage.

We pause briefly here to recall the stages of our lives. Every stage of our life is the fulfillment of the promise of more of our previous stage. So truly, in every stage of our life – now – is the best time of our life, if we know how to look beneath all the things happenings at our present.

4. New understanding of the Eucharist.

The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of ‘nuclear fission,’ to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all.

(Pope Benedict, *Sacramentum Caritatis*)

Nuclear fission is a process whereby a heavy nucleus, bombarded by neutrons, produces a steady supply of energy, resulting in the emergence of new realities. It is a powerful image for the Eucharistic transformation. Because of the interweaving of everything in the universe, within bread are the wheat fields, the sun, rain, soil, air, yeast, salt, sugar, people who planted and harvested, millers, cooks, and on and on.

When, over the bread at the Eucharistic table, the Church pronounces Christ’s words “This is my body,” these words, like a bombarding particle, sets the process of nuclear fission going. Chain reaction links all the components of the universe. The words do not just go over creation, but “penetrates to the heart of all being,” deeply into the galactic skies and everything it holds, every element, every form on earth, every species; all becoming, in time, the body of Christ, a “radical change” taking place in creation. As Pope Benedict says, it is a process of transformation until “God will be all in all,” the divinization of creation. At

its deepest level, creation is the body of Christ. As such, all creation is holy. Only Christ can do this! In the new cosmology, this is the *Why* Christ came into the planet.

5. Deeper awareness of the unity and interconnectedness of all.

Embracing the interconnectedness of all life, we can again weave together the rift between the sacred and secular, the Totality will be seen as sacred.

“On the cosmic scale, we are members of God’s universe, a Universe that is permeated with an energy of attraction into community. That energy shows itself in the gravitational attraction by which everything and everyone is attracted to everything and everyone. This need for relationships, the longing for love, the allurements into community, is the most lasting blessing of our lives.”

(John Surrence, SJ)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads: “God wills the interdependence of creatures...” To be is to be related, to “inter-be” according to Thich Nhat Hanh.

Indra’s Net in Hua’ yen school of Buddhism symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos.

“In the god Indra’s celestial abode, a wonderful net is stretched in all directions and there is one glittering jewel at every node shining brighter than the stars because the polished surface of every jewel reflects all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number so that the process of reflection is infinite.” Everything that exists in Indra’s Net intimates all that exists, has existed and will exist. This kind of analogy has been suggested by science as a theory for an essential characteristic of the cosmos.

The Challenge in Ongoing Formation

We look at a Mythic story, the "Rebirth of an Eagle" as we look at the challenges of Ongoing formation in our time. It is a myth

so we do not take it as factual but take its message.

The eagle has the longest lifespan of its species and can live up to 70 years... but to reach this age, the eagle must make a hard decision. In its 40th year its long and flexible talons can no longer grab prey which serves as food, its long and sharp beak becomes bent and its old aged and heavy wings, due to their thick feathers, stick to its chest and make it difficult to fly.

Then, the eagle is left with only two options; die or go through a painful process of change which lasts 150 days. The process requires that the eagle fly to a mountain top and sit on its nest. There the eagle knocks its beak against a rock until it plucks it out. Then the eagle waits for a new beak to grow back.

It will pull out its talons and when new talons grow back, the eagle starts plucking its old aged feathers. After five months, the eagle takes its famous flight of rebirth and lives for 30 more years.

Many times, in order to survive, we have to start a change process. We sometimes need to get rid of old memories, habits, and other past traditions. Only freed from the past, can we take advantage of the present, and I add, of the future.

Formation is life-long. The journey through change to Transformation is a journey for the mature soul. In our world of cultural changes happening with great speed, there remains our call together with the fewer new and majority ageing members—to transform Self and the World until Christ is All in All.

I find this as *the* challenge for formators that have been “re-cycled” through the years, that is, who have been long on the job. We cannot stop moving, growing, changing. The three-tiered movements of growth that we talked about invites us to actively participate in God’s movements in our life, in the world and in the universe. As we grow more mature, the movement is paradoxically, a movement towards more through the process of letting go.

Ignatius’ *Suscipe* invites us to surrender the “*Less*” for the sake of the “*More*.” Take my Liberty....to surrender our false notions of

what it means to live free to receive God’s freedom, to live for the whole and not for our own little part. Take my Memory...to surrender my database of “programs,” making today’s choices using yesterday’s data... to be freed from the power of old hard-wired memories so as to choose the more loving way appropriate to the situation. Take my Understanding... to surrender my own limited understanding of things, my certainties... to be open to your Mystery. Take my entire Will... to surrender my determination to make things fit my needs...to be able to refocus my gaze, moment by moment, on your Dream for the whole of Creation.

Let us open our hands in a gesture of surrender and pray: *Take, Lord, everything I have and call my own. Give me the grace to surrender all that is partial and fleeting (my “less”) and become free to receive your wholeness and completeness (your “more.”)*

Conclusion

To bring this presentation to a close, let us think back on how we began with the awesome images of the unfelt yet real movements of our planet; weaving these movements in the life of Formators as we en flesh the “why” of formation, and being open to the Universe’s conspiracy to face the future with hope in our on-going growth I kept asking myself why I accepted Peter’s invitation to speak on this topic among experienced Formators.)

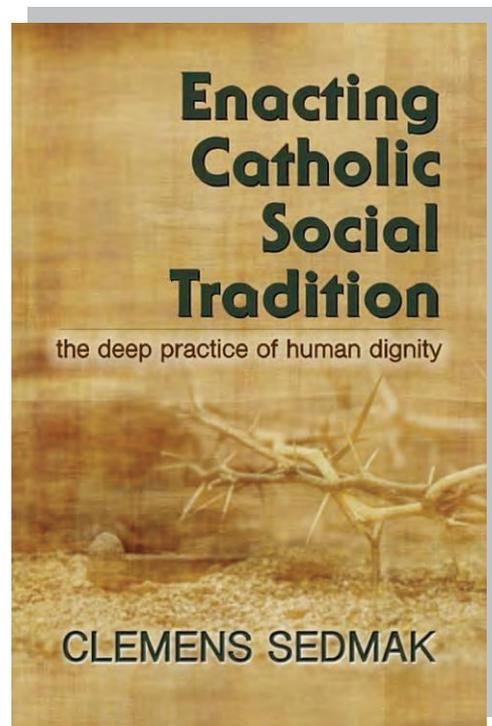
In the process of preparation and time-travelling from 1973 till today, I felt a sense of fulfilment in being able to share my life-long labor of love. I felt awed at being mysteriously involved in God’s eons-long labor of love, calling us and gracing us to respond to his desire to make a home among us, in our hearts, in the whole of creation.

So, with gratitude WE STAY IN THE CALL, STAY YOUTHFUL IN SPIRIT AND STAY BLESSED.

What are my sources for this talk? ... my mentors’ life-examples and of the soul friends I met along my path. This includes

the many authors of books, articles that I have digested and made my own. Among them: Anthony de Mello, Brian Swimme, Ignatius of Loyola, Cynthia Beurgeault, Pope Francis, Judith Canato, Teilhard de Chardin, Richard Rohr, Ron Rolheiser, Joyce Rupp, Margaret Silf, John Surette, Perla Macapinlac and so many others. My thanks to them all.

I wish I could offer more precise citations, articles, books, pages, lectures... But at this point in my journey, I can hardly to do that, that is my limitation. Because out of these sources, I have made a personal quilt, patchwork, or better still, the truth and beauty of these sources have passed through my being these many years. They have melded together and were colored in different hues with my evolved experiences of God, of creation, of formation ministries, of my dreams – it has become my own, and all I could offer to you today was a splash of those intermingling colors on a wall that now waits for you to create your own mural.



(Gift from Orbis Books to Sedos Library)

Daniele G. Giusti, MCCJ

What did we learn as missionaries from the Covid-19 epidemics?



Bro Daniele Giusti is a Comboni Missionary Brother, a medical doctor who first served as volunteer in Northern Uganda. Later in 1986 he practiced in a diocesan Hospital in Karamoja.

After eleven years he joined the Catholic Medical Bureau as Health secretary of the Bishop's Conference Uganda, and in 2009 he became member of the General Council of the Comboni Missionaries. In 2016 he served as director and coordinator of the nursing homes of the Comboni Missionaries in Milan, the epicentre of the epidemic appearance in the West. He is now Secretary General of the Institute.

My preamble, besides the presentation attached below, includes the expression of a perplexity that I had to win when Fr. Baekelmans, asked me to speak at this event. I am not an “expert” but just a practitioner in the field of health care with background missionary experience who, for the last ten years or so has worked in Italy. The only title I can “claim” to be here is that I was involved in the organization of health care since the very outset of the epidemic, having to learn how to cope with it. As matter of fact, I was asked to enter a completely different field of work just in the middle of an epidemic which has, so far, not ended, and perhaps has something else to teach us. This passage was somewhat abrupt and, without interruption, I plunged into a different world without much time to organise my thoughts and feelings. Hence, I feel unprepared to make an organized exposition of the synthesis of my experience. Only the words of Fr. Peter Baekelmans convinced me that I

could come before you, because he asked me that I should simply share my experience, giving a kind of witness. This is exactly what I will do, apologizing if it will fall short of your expectations.

Before closing my preamble, I must say that when I started working on this presentation we were just about to enter the new crisis of the war – we can use the word – between Russia and Ukraine. It's a new crisis for those, like me, who look at things from the perspective of the West. Those hearing or reading these words coming from other parts of the planet may object that they have already been “experiencing” the devastating effects of one or more of the many localized wars of what has already been defined by Pope Francis the “piecemeal” WW3. The potential of escalation, of globalization of this new “piece” of war fought on European soil is nonetheless unprecedented, and I am sure that very soon we will have to learn to cope with acute energy crises, food crises and new financial crises; I am also sure that in some parts of the world food and power have already started becoming rarer and more expensive, thus threatening the livelihood of families and communities, and causing social and political turmoil.

What started off as an epidemic outbreak – the Covid related crisis that we thought was almost over is now taking up new colours: those of war and those of impending famine on much larger proportions than those experienced at a smaller scale in many parts of the world thus far. There is more to come, and all these crises are interlinked and connected.

Hence the legitimate question: is it possible for us who qualify as missionaries – i.e. those people who by specific call and mandate by Jesus and in the Church have to

“look at the broader horizon”, at the frontiers of our own culture and identity, have go out towards the periphery of human experience... etc. to avoid the challenge of the deeply interlinked processes that are developing world-wide? In other words, the challenge of complexity in this era of shifting paradigms is an ever-growing awareness that accompanies our human adventure.

It's not an epoch of change but an epochal change – the Popes have been repeating -; well now we seem to start realizing that indeed it is so. This very challenge risks to overwhelm us because we feel – and most of us are – ill equipped to face complexity at a global scale. It's true. But this is not my direct concern because my experience is limited to the narrower field of healthcare; I hope nonetheless to be able to share with you, before closing, a pacifying thought that keep in store for all the times I feel overwhelmed by too much complexity and too many challenges. Having ended the preamble, I will start my presentation.

I arrived in my new post in Rome one year after the outbreak of the epidemic. I had spent the first seven months of the epidemic in our nursing home in Milan: Milan and its surroundings have been the epicentre of the outbreak of Covid-19 in the western hemisphere, hence we were the first to be hit, caught completely unawares and ill equipped to face it; it hit us with an unimaginable violence. In a few days all that we knew as way of life and work – especially healthcare work – had to be reprogrammed without knowing exactly how. Later in the same year I had to move to the other bigger nursing home near Verona where a much worse outbreak had occurred in the second wave of the epidemic. In a few months I lost to the Covid-19 disease 15 confreres I cared and treated. The first among them – our first confrere to succumb to the Covid-19 - was the superior of our community in Milan, a confrere I had asked and convinced to join me in Milan in the service of our old and sick brothers. I signed the death certificate of most of them. Some of them had to be

admitted to the hospital and I soon discovered that I was unable to visit or communicate with them, despite my professional status. I could not attend their burial: they simply disappeared from my eyesight, taken away by an ambulance, and that was all. Sometimes I was even unable to follow them through contacts with my colleagues in the hospital: they too were so overwhelmed and unable to manage the contacts with relatives and friends of their patients. This experience was so distressing that eventually we stopped referring patients to hospital.

The demands coming from the organization of service were daunting: in a few months I had to write 4 plans of service delivery reorganization of our nursing homes for the sole reason of satisfying the demands of the National Health System in the application of the continuous development of rules and health regulations. In the first weeks I spent many hours every day over the internet, in the futile attempt of finding and buying the badly needed of protective gear we did not have and that seemed to be the only protection we had against the onslaught of the virus.

In retrospective, it is possible that such heavy work pressure – and need to ensure performance - had kept me going. I never had the time to pay too much attention to my emotions, and it did not even cross my mind that it would have been wise or necessary to do so. I, and the other staff, simply had to go on because we could not afford the privilege to lower our guard. That was it. In retrospective I do not have regrets also because, compared to other nursing homes in the area, we did not perform badly: elsewhere death rates were much higher.

After about one year, as soon as the second wave of the epidemic started relenting, I received the request to report to our Rome's Headquarters to undertake the service of Secretary General in the phase of preparation of the Chapter; my superiors had identified a young confrere, a medical doctor like me, who could take over my service and he rapidly reached Milan. Hence, after a brief

handover I moved to Rome, soon after the beginning of the “vaccination campaign” phase in the outbreak. It was not easy leaving my post but the fact that we started having the concrete hope of a tool to stop the epidemic made it easier.

If I had been asked only a few months earlier if vaccines were to be expected within the course of the epidemic I would have burst out in laughter: it simply looked impossible. Yet, there we were: on the 6th January 2021, ten months after the outset of the pandemic; I, all my confreres and all the staff in Milan’s Nursing home and health care facilities received their first shot of vaccination, followed by a second one three weeks later. What had been accomplished in that short period by the Pharmaceutical Industry Complex is simply staggering and undisputable: we may have reservations about motives, methods and the modus operandi of Big Pharma, but we must recognize that the end-result is something that goes beyond our most optimistic expectations.

Our Nursing Home was even one of the first to be selected because all the plans we had drafted gave enough confidence that we were able to handle the complexity of the vaccination campaign of an extremely expensive, difficult to handle and still rare vaccine. So, by the time I left all my confreres – and the staff – had received the “two shots” which, at that time, represented the highest level of protection; hence I was confident that I was not betraying my old confreres.

A few days after my arrival in Rome we had a community meeting and the superior asked me to say something about my experience, what I had gone through etc. The community of Rome too had its own moments of acute distress but, on the whole, things were much better; I must also say that on my arrival I found a community where measures of protection had been established and obeyed without grumbling by almost everybody. Perhaps this high level of compliance was due to the shock caused by the death of the former superior which had sadly occurred

few months earlier – the only death in a community of 50 and over.

I started my sharing on a safe ground, speaking of the wisdom of the behaviours the community of Rome had adopted, how I was impressed by the sensible self-imposed discipline and by the great compliance of confreres... It all went smoothly until I had to start mentioning my experience, how I had gone through that past year at the frontline in a nursing home: I soon realized that I could not. I started off with few words and I had to stop because words were competing with tears; I had to choose silence to avoid a show of emotion that was quite unusual for me. It was the first time in my adult life that I could not control my emotions in public. It came as a shocking surprise to me, something out of the blue, unexpected. The respectful silence that surrounded me was louder than words and gratefully welcome. After a while the chairman who was conducting the meeting thanked me and mercifully moved to another point in the agenda.

I could say with regret that it was a missed opportunity of giving names to the causes of the distress that affected me or that it was an aborted “healing session” but, in retrospective, I must say that the simple fact that there was an audience eager to listen to my silence, unsolicited and respectful, had an unexpected healing and liberating effect. I realized that I had strong emotions buried in my heart and that I did not pay to them the attention they deserved. I realized also that I needed to recognize them and share them. I realized that no matter how professional habit had educated me to sustain emotions with a certain degree of “aplomb” I had to mourn my losses like anybody else, recognizing the healing power of human solidarity and affection.

What did I learn, then – here is the first lesson -? As consecrated people, charged with the demand of the offices entrusted to us, we feel the pressure of performance and we are bound to the outward appearance of our role. I certainly felt the pressure of performance, as I said, both as professional

of health and as religious. More in general, as missionaries, people who must move always further where Jesus has not yet been known and encountered, we are quite often denied the reward of seeing the fruits of our labour. On those rare occasions when we do it, we enjoy it so much that “moving further on towards the frontier” entails a great deal of sacrifice. In any case the pressure of performance is there.

We end up by thinking that we cannot afford to appear as lost as everyone else, as confused as everyone else; whether we like it or not, we are often the only point of secure recourse and help for many people, especially those who are less equipped to go through crises without severe damage or even total loss. The Covid outbreak has deprived many of us of the known tools of secure performance and when, in the year of the epidemic at the frontline, we did perform, we often did it with great emotional distress. I did perform, as I said earlier, but my heart had become cold as a stone.

To be clear: I do not regret the fact that I was able – with the help of some confreres and of a group of employees who were startlingly quite often heroic in their duty – to minimize the devastating effects of the outbreak on my confreres. But that revealing moment in Rome made me realize that something had gone amiss: that weakness, recognized and accepted weakness, embraced by a community of people gathered by Jesus, could bring about a liberating and heart-warming experience.

How often had I read and said and meditated upon the fact that Jesus saved me, saved the world, keeps saving me and the world, through the acceptance of his annihilation? We have given a name to this process: kenosis. But what about our humiliations and failures and incapacitations such as those we have experienced during the Covid epidemic? Have we learnt, have I learnt to embrace them not just because I cannot do anything to avoid them, but because I recognize that my humiliation, my failure, my helplessness, embraced through an act of

free assent, is missionary, and eventually also gladdening?

Perhaps we need to have more of these moments when we accept, embrace and communicate weakness – not simply because sound psychology teaches us that it’s something good to do. What I learnt, what I think we ought to learn better, is that, perhaps, performance is not always attractive; it can be admired, but it does not necessarily attract. When, instead, we feel glad because we’ve recognized and accepted our weakness under the influence of the sympathy of a loving gaze upon us – as I did during that sharing session on my arrival in Rome - there is chance there for us to be attractive. The perceivable gladness we are sometimes able to project when we feel loved, welcome and embraced in our weakness is attractive.

The Popes have kept telling us that the Gospel spreads because it makes people who embrace it attractive. The Gospels we announce spreads and is accepted because it attracts through us. Quite often I thought that admiration – like the admiration that good performance may create - would do the trick, but now I seem to understand that admiration and attraction are different and that, to be missionaries, we absolutely need to be attractive.

There is another thing that I learnt through the Covid-19 experience. It concerns the “vaccine yes-vaccine no” saga we have seen in many parts of the world. I am not forgetting here the fact that in many other parts of the world there was no such saga because there were no vaccines, or very few doses of them. I am referring to the utter surprise that I registered when in my Country -Italy -we witnessed the development of a quite strong and socially vocal movement opposing the use of vaccines and in particular the vaccines against Covid that had so surprisingly been developed and distributed free.

I have already said that when vaccines against Covid appeared in the late 2020-early 2021 I felt quite relieved, so much that I did

not fear leaving my place of work because, in my mind and in my expectations, I surmised that the worst was over. My trust in vaccines is almost absolute. I am quite aware that they are not a magic-pill, and I am also quite aware that, sometimes, their protective effect has limitations; I also know that sometimes they have side effects. My trust is not even based on the studies I have done. It comes from experience, from sheer experience; it's because I have seen with my own eyes their amazing power.

When I went to my mission station in Matany Hospital in Uganda in the mid-eighties, I found that there was an unexpected ward: it was called "measles' ward". It was quite big: it had about 25 dedicated beds over a total of 200 or so beds in the whole Hospital. When the duty rota assigned me to that ward, it was always a heart-breaking experience. The ward was filled by anguished mothers nursing very sick infants and some children: these mothers knew that the chances of their child's survival were not many. In fact, about one out of four would not make it, despite our efforts in treating them.

In the western world we have forgotten that measles is a very serious disease; nowadays also Africa has almost forgotten it, but it was not so thirty – forty years ago, before the launching, by UNICEF and WHO, of the Expanded Programs of Immunization. These programs were simply aiming at making vaccines available and administrable at the grassroot in poor countries which could not afford to spend money on prevention. This program reached Karamoja in the mid-eighties (just about the time I reached Matany). The Karimojong tribe living around Matany is nomadic and the culture and wellbeing of "Karimojongs" turns around cows. Because of this detail, they had come to learn through experience that vaccines were good for cows. Having seen their protective effects on cows they had no resistance in accepting that vaccines were good also to protect their kids. Karamoja was therefore a "no-vax free" region: on the contrary, people would flock to the

immunization sessions we held in the hospital's outstations. The success of the mass vaccination campaigns in Karamoja was such that in less than five years we could close the "measles' ward" simply because measles had disappeared. The same happened also for other bad diseases as polio, whooping cough, diphtheria, neonatal tetanus and other less known diseases that had ravaged also the west in the past centuries, up to the middle of the XX century.

Compared to the West, it took some 30 to 50 years to make mass vaccination a routine in Africa, but when these campaigns went under way, they quantitatively saved many more lives in history than all the treatments, drugs and other medical gadgets developed ever since the beginning of anthropocene. Anthropocene is the era of increasing human control – and eventually of permanent modification - over nature's ecosystems: some geologists date its beginning at the outset of the industrial revolution, some others would want it to start towards the middle of the XX Century. I leave these discussions to the scientific circles. In medicine the fact remains: vaccines are the most powerful tool humanity has developed to save lives from the scourge of epidemics.

I think it will be clear then to understand how puzzled I was when, towards the middle of last year, we had to accept that quite a good number of people had become opposed to the Covid vaccine for the most disparate reasons. Even in our ranks there have been conferees that started resisting the suggestions to go for vaccination. Some became quite entrenched in their beliefs and arguments, argumentative and sometimes actively trying to convince others not to go for vaccination. I am sure that in all our institutes we've had (and still have) brothers and sisters who have turned no-vax and even no-vax activist. I have no intention of examining the reasons and giving medical explanations in support of my very strong belief to the contrary. There is an argument which I consider the most important for human groups like ours that live in

community. Being vaccinated makes common life much easier and uncomplicated. There is, in my understanding, also a moral obligation to do our best to avoid being the cause of contagion of other persons living with me, no matter how involuntary and unintended that may be.

I think it is a common experience for those of us who live in communities where there are members holding a strong no-vax stand (or no compliance with the indicated prudential measures – mask, distance, hand’s hygiene) that community life becomes difficult to manage. We are in fact a mixed-lot: we have confreres that quite adaptable and compliant out of simple rational conviction; we have confreres that are compliant out of fear; we have confreres that are convinced no-vax; others that are scared no-vax; others that are bordering obsessive-compulsory behaviours and freak-out when someone gets too close; others that are reckless and like to show that they have no fear whatsoever of any contagion.

To cut matters short: I maintain that resisting vaccination against Covid is wrong; I am not one inch less convinced than I ever was. But there is something I had to learn; we are brothers and sisters, and a mixed lot: how do we learn to live together in a peaceful way when opposed convictions are strong (such as mine is) and when there may be a real danger of contagion brought about by the uneven protection we have developed? This is the dilemma we face, a dilemma I have not solved. But I did instead learn something.

Differences are a fact of life, thanks to God. In our context as missionary and international congregations this aspect is magnified and it is no surprise that, sometimes – or perhaps more often than we would like - differences are difficult to harmonise and compose. Because of that many Institutes have dedicated to this aspect of life paths of formation to help us manage the challenge of multiculturalism. One thing is sure: Jesus entrusted to unity, to the visibility of our unity, the effectiveness of our witness: « ...that they may be one as we are one in them and you in me, so that they may be

brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me... (Jn 17, 22-23) ».

So, we have certainly learnt that differences are no threat to unity and that harmony and uniformity are two different things. Those of us who have had some formation in the understanding of the many hues that can be attached to words like unity, difference, culture, bias, prejudice, harmony... and, also, in the management of conflicts arising in communities, could give a real help in teaching me some necessary skills. This is not what I want to speak about. But I will use an example drawn from my experience to explain what I learnt.

Few weeks ago, a confrere arrived in our community in Rome, to stay for a few days. I have already told you that our community in Rome has been very “obedient”: all vaccinated, all respectful of the measures of mutual protection. We have a group of old confreres and amongst them there are some who, to date, are – understandably - quite scared at the perspective of contagion. Among them, some few were disturbed by the presence of this confrere and asked me “to do something about it”.

Unfortunately, in our hyper-medicalised culture, doctors are often called upon to handle much more than diseases. All types of behavioural troubles are quite often looked at as diseases and we are asked to intervene. I can live with that. What instead I do not like at all is when doctors are called upon to become law-enforcers. But I must live with it, too. So, reluctantly, I approached this confrere and asked him why he had not received the vaccination. I just wanted to open the dialogue to find a point of entry to bring forward my suggestion of a need of change of stand (of course, his, not mine!). Even though I had approached him with no predisposition towards confrontation (I had no intention to fight a holy war in favour of vaccine but simply with the intention to trigger some kind of moral evaluation of the situation in front of the uneasiness that his presence was creating) I saw my “good

predisposition” vanish in front of this confrere’s staunch ideological no-vax stand. Hence, I limited my dialogue with him to a simple suggestion that he, as religious and bound to live in a community, should feel the urge of responsibility towards the fragile members of this community.

As I said earlier, in my mind this is the most convincing argument and the least controversial: it hinges on the mutual obligation of “custody” we all share. I did not challenge his beliefs and his ideology. I tried to click another, more fundamental, button, thinking that it was the right approach. But while I was doing this, I realized that in my heart I had already passed a judgement on that confrere: not on his choices or on his behaviour: on him. I also immediately realized that he had clicked on a defensive position and that I had lost contact with him.

Effectiveness in our mission stems first from the visibility of our unity. There is a big difference between unity built on human skills – undoubtedly desirable and even necessary – and unity built on the centre that attracts us all: Jesus. Before all our differences there is a point of unity among us that hinges on the fact that we are a gift to each other: we are given, drawn together in a mysterious way to be companions on a journey towards our destiny. Religious life, at its essential, is nothing else than this. When religious life is faithful to its own nature, it is attractive, and therefore, by nature, missionary. When Jesus approached the Samaritan Lady, or Martha, or Simon, He did reproach them; He corrected them, but He did so by evoking in them first the awareness of their dignity in the eyes of God. This must have shown in some way in his gaze, in his touch, in His “style”, because the result we see in the memorable pages of the Gospel narrating the stories of these encounters, all point to the fact that He was perceived as an exceptionally attractive presence. He was so attractive that those relating to Him felt such original correspondence of heart that all resistance, all self-defence disappeared. Then, but only then, He also gave a name to

what was wrong, and sometimes it was not even necessary. The rest, conversion, change of behaviour, came as consequence.

What I really learnt from this recent experience is the need of a better “hygiene” of my heart’s position. I cannot relate to my confrere, and even less pretend to correct him, if my heart and my gaze on him are not pure, if they are tainted by prejudice. My prejudice might even be objectively right, but if not cleared first, it will be perceived as prejudice, and therefore undermine our mission. Soon after I lost contact with my “no-vax” brother I mentioned earlier I felt sorry, even though we did not have any argument. I simply realized that I had lost contact with him. I did re-state with kind finality the truth I perceived and that was all. In retrospective I might even be tempted to consider it a victory of sort. To the scared confreres who questioned me about “what I had done with him?” I simply said “I told him!”, with the implied false inference that I had scored success. But my heart was telling me another story.

My heart does not betray me: it speaks, and it speaks the truth. But it does so in a discrete way: I must work to listen to its voice. What did it tell me? That I had deprived my confrere with the only solid basis of dialogue: the recognition of his dignity, of that “given” that comes before his opinions, his being right or wrong, his being a good guy or a bad guy. This is not Jesus’ approach. What I really learnt is that I have work to do to improve my capacity of recognizing the dignity of the person in front of me before anything else. Dignity is not attribute by me: it is objective, and I must simply recognize it. I think that this work is called ascesis. In other words what I really learnt from this recent experience is the need of a better “hygiene” of my heart’s position. I cannot relate to my confrere, and even less pretend to correct him, if my heart and my gaze on him are not pure, if they are tainted by prejudice.

Now I come to the last thing I learnt: I said in my preamble that it was my intention not to deal with “broader picture”. With this I

mean the complexity we are facing in the era of “epochal change” inhabited by the real possibility of the three apocalyptic scourges of plague, famine and war becoming a reality for us. There is nonetheless a quote I came across that I have always found inspiring when confronted with unsolvable dilemmas. It is taken from the book “After Virtue” of Alasdair McIntyre:

"A decisive turning point in that earlier history came when men and women of good will turned away from the task of supporting the Roman imperium and stopped identifying the continuation of civilization and the moral community with the preservation of that imperium. Instead, the task they set for themselves was the construction of new forms of community within which moral life could be sustained, so that both civilization and morality would have the possibility of surviving the epoch of incipient barbarism and obscurity "

It is a quote referring to the early days of the Benedictine’s experience and perhaps of Celtic Monasticism that along centuries – from its humble and almost invisible beginnings – would spread everywhere in Europe and would shape it, equipping the church – without having planned it - with the “*unum necessarium*” to move through – meaningfully - in that era of epochal change and apocalyptic scourges.

I said earlier that I exercised my first ministry of missionary doctor in that remote hospital of North-western Uganda – in Karamoja. Karamoja’s environment and story are frequently confronted with violence related to customary cattle rustling, with recurrent waves of epidemics and famine. In this kind of environment, strongly resilient to the penetration of the Gospel, I was often confronted with the apparent futility of patching bodies and bones shattered by gunshot wounds of cattle-rustlers (often of opposing factions) who only seemed to look forward to the time when, cured, could go back to their main occupation: using violence to steal the cows needed for their marriage, causing poverty and devastation that would

later become hunger and disease.... Sometimes I was so disheartened that I started doubting that my tireless medical and missionary work had a meaning.

At one of this “down points” of my heart I came across this quote, and I found solace and comfort in it. The hospital was a community of people, some linked by the bond of religious vows (my brothers and sisters), whose life was shaped by the bond created by the “*unum necessarium*”. Around them a small but growing number of Karimojong had started living according to a different set of values, attracted by what they were seeing, albeit not necessarily always converted. Some were simple workers of the hospital. They were no longer attracted, though, by the old customs of the place. In my mind I started comparing the community of the Hospital to that of a Monastery. This is perhaps a preposterous thought, but it consoled me enough to go ahead without suffering scandal, and enough to remain faithful to my vocation there.

When things seem to be overwhelming – I spoke earlier challenge of complexity at a global level – and of the possible uncertain future that epidemics, war, food and power shortages seem to be preparing for us, we need to go back to what is essential. The Founder of my Congregation, St Daniel Comboni, always referred to the missions he wanted his missionaries to give life to as a “Cenacle of apostles”. There I was, challenged and tempted to give up and at the same time sustained day after day by a company whose presence embodied His Presence – the presence of the Lord. His was the task of attracting people towards Him. For us the “*unum necessarium*” was to sustain each other’s memory, in the daily tension to catch, in the sequence of circumstances of which time is made, the Mysterious Presence of our Redeemer. A Redeemer who is at work, tirelessly, to make everything new, even the Covid epidemic, and, perhaps, even this ghastly war developing under our eyes. That is what I am learning and that I want to keep learning.

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Missionary Religious Institutes and Christian Witness

Past, Present and Future.

This article has been written by the former Director of SEDOS with the cooperation of some of the SEDOS members at the request of the Pontifical Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and recently published in the book: “Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World”. It gives an update on the situation of efforts in Interreligious Dialogue by SEDOS Members and others in the different continents.

The contribution of Missionary Religious Institutes to the “Christian Witness” in a multi-religious world is in one word *immense*. Missionary Religious Institutes carry out a great variety of activities in the field of Interreligious Dialogue: education, parish life, social activities, research, theology of religions, specialized studies, centers of dialogue and so on. They are doing their utmost to respond to Vatican II’s invitation to enter into dialogue with other religions. Missionary Religious Institutes are born from the desire to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, and thus also to people of other religions. However, at the same time they are “confronted” with all the good there is in other cultures and religions. This makes their mission more *complex*, because mission is not a one-way activity, but happens in dialogue with the other people and their culture *and* religion. And lastly, Missionary Religious Institutes have also *evolved* from being mainly Western-based institutions to include new members from the whole world and from all cultures. Also new native Missionary Societies and

Congregations came into existence. Naturally, these new members bring their own cultural and religious sensitivities to the mission and dialogue of the Church, which at times makes the dialogue even more complex.

The new road of dialogue the Church has chosen with the world, and especially with other religions, since Vatican II is very encouraging, but at the same time also very demanding. As Director of SEDOS, I was invited to join the Vatican Delegation to the 14th Ecumenical *Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* in Arusha, Tanzania, 8-13 March 2018, organized by the World Council of Churches. Listening to the different contributions at the conference, I noticed a difference between those who are more concerned with *Evangelism*, the direct *preaching* of Jesus Christ, and those who set a good example while doing *Mission*, working for peace, justice, poverty, healthcare and so on, but often forget to preach the Gospel while doing their charitable work. Maintaining the *balance between efforts in Evangelization and efforts in Mission* requires a constant effort because both – *word and action* – form part of bearing Christian witness (see document on *Christian Witness*, “A Basis for Christian Witness”, n. 2).²⁰ However, it is not easy to

²⁰ The difficulty to keep the balance between interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the faith can be seen in the different documents issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, as e.g. *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), and prior to that in the document on Interreligious Dialogue of Vatican II, *Nostrae Aetate*, n. 2 (1965).

listen and at the same time be keen to share one's own faith. Participants in interreligious dialogue tend to *sacrifice* their own identity and message for the benefit of dialogue.

Others are *too convinced* of their own belief to be open to what is "true and holy"²¹ in (and for) other religions and refuse to dialogue, or misuse the dialogue for their own hidden agenda.

Missionary Religious Institutes experience the same dilemma. Some missionaries perceive the effort to dialogue as contrary to what mission is about. Mission to them is in the first place *Evangelization*, which means spreading the Good News through

preaching. They fail to see that Interreligious Dialogue is part of the Church's evangelizing mission (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 56). Mission is not exclusively a "Church growth activity" through preaching and baptizing, but it also means building the *Kingdom of God* through works of charity. Interreligious dialogue makes an essential contribution to peace in the world. What is the place of Interreligious Dialogue then? Is it part of Evangelization (with conversion to values of the Kingdom of God as its aim) or is it part of Mission (with peace as its aim)? It is both! There is no Christian dialogue if there is no "proclamation" of Jesus in it.²² Only by keeping the balance will the dialogue be a true dialogue.

The general opinion of Missionary Religious Institutes is that *interreligious dialogue is one of the pillars of global Mission today*. This is proven by the different missionary symposia held by SEDOS for (and by) its more than 80-member missionary

Congregations, or by the events organized in Rome itself, such as the *Interreligious Pilgrimage to the Holy Door* in 2016 and the *Interfaith Chanting* at the Basilica of Santa

Cecilia in 2018. The present essay aims to give an idea of how on the different continents this Christian Witness in a multi-religious context has taken shape, how it is today, and what challenges it will face in the future. We will listen to "activists" in the dialogue, active in and for their own Missionary Religious Institute. Their contributions will enlighten us as to how Christian witness is going on in respect for, and in dialogue with, other

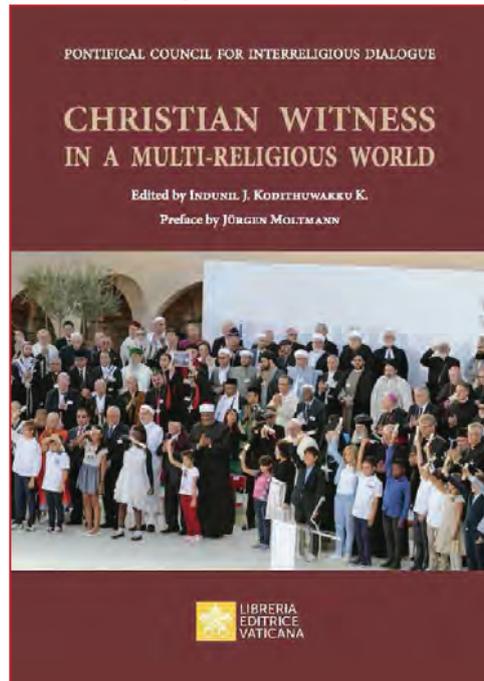
religions. We will start from my own specialization, Japan and the Asian continent where there has been both a longstanding effort and a profound experience in the dialogue.

Experience from Asia

The Challenge of Continuing the Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is an indispensable aspect of the mission in Asia where *living in harmony* is much valued.²³ Missionary Religious Institutes are doing their best to make a positive contribution in this context while bearing witness to their own religion, not always easy when dealing with old and well-rooted religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Taoism, and Shintoism. Whereas before many of these religious traditions were open to the encounter with Christianity, there is now a

²³ The Federation of Asian Bishops encourages a triple form of dialogue (with the poor, with the culture, and interreligious), and speaks of an Asian theology of religion based on a "Theology of Harmony".



²¹ *Nostra Aetate*, n. 2.

²² Jan Van Bragt, CICM, "Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelization", in *Japanese Religions*, Vol. 25 (1999), 126.

certain trend of nationalism combined with exclusivism, visible on the level of religion, and a fear of “conversion activities” by Christian missionaries. Also, Christians tend to be more exclusive and conservative in the Asian context, as they are a minority in most Asian countries, except for the Philippines. On the other hand, missionaries from the more Catholic countries do not fear the encounter with other religions so much. Therefore, we sometimes see a tension and discrepancy between the local clergy and the missionary when it comes to interreligious dialogue.

Study of Other Religions

Missionary Religious Institutions make a great effort to *study other religions*. In Japan, for instance, we have the *Center for the Study of Religions and Culture* at Nanzan University (SVD), the *ORIENS Institute for Religious Research* (CICM) where I worked for a couple of years, and the *Asian Study Center* (XX). They keep the members updated in matters of dialogue and other religions. An interesting evolution was the start a couple of years ago of a twice-yearly meeting of scholars from *religion-related religious research centers* to discuss the results of their research. The meetings start with a prayer-meditation, and conclude with a visit to a local Buddhist temple, Christian church, or Shinto shrine. However, due to a decrease in the number of missionaries there are fewer missionaries who opt (or are allowed) to engage full-time in the study of other religions. Nevertheless, this kind of missionary is necessary. The mission in China today, for instance, is confronted with a demand from the government for a more “Chinese” Catholicism.²⁴ This *sinization* effort can only be made by those who have studied Buddhist compassion, Confucianist ethics, and Taoist mystical thinking.

²⁴ Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, “Le Sfide della Chiesa in Cina oggi”, in *SEDOS Bulletin* Vol. 52, 5/6, 22.

Experience of Other Religious Practices

Besides the study of other religions, there are Roman-Catholic centers that facilitate the *experience of other religious practices*. India is a stronghold in this way of doing dialogue. I too experienced, a long time ago, the Benedictine *Sacchidananda Ashram* in Tiruchirapally where Fr. Bede Griffiths, OSB, celebrated the Eucharist in an Indian way.²⁵ We have now got used to an Indian liturgy of the Eucharistic, with its typical fire ritual *arati*, but this inculturation did not come by itself. Had there not been courageous people to try it out, it would have remained a simple wish. Another example is *Shinmeizan Centre of Spirituality and Interreligious Dialogue* of the Xaverian Missionaries in Kyushu, Japan, where one can experience Christian monastic life and the liturgy in a Zen-Buddhist way, embedded in Japanese spirituality.

Building a Theology of Religions

Many religious missionaries have specialized in a specific religion and teach it at Roman-Catholic universities and write books about it. These scholarly contributions are not always adequately known, but are slowly building up a *Christian theology of religion*. I think here for instance of the Benedictine monk Fr. Okumura Ichiro. As a young man he was a Zen Buddhist and wanted to write his thesis for the university on the superiority of Buddhism over Christianity. But later by studying Christianity he was taken with the greatness of its teaching and Tradition, and converted to Christianity, without ever speaking ill of his former belief. Fr. Willem Johnston, SJ, is another great example in Japan of the search to understand the mysticism of other religious traditions. In India, Fathers Jacques Dupuis, Amalopavardass, Antony de Mello, Raimon Panikkar, and Samuel Rayan are some of the best-known theologians who have searched for a happy marriage between Hindu and Christian spirituality.

²⁵ There are other Ashrams too, like *Kurisumala Ashram*, and other lesser known ones in different parts of India.

Contribution to a Lasting Peace

In many Asian countries there is the wish to live peacefully together with their different religions. We find therefore in many dioceses that the effort to “build relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions” (see *Recommendation*, n. 2 of the *Christian Witness* document) culminates in the form of a yearly common *prayer for peace* (see *Recommendation*, n. 6).²⁶ Sometimes Missionary Religious Institutes have initiated these yearly encounters or continue to support them (e.g. CICM in Tokyo Diocese). During the preparation for these events one gets to know the religious leaders of other religions better and one can build bridges where needed. These events are also ways to show publicly the relevancy of religious institutions and to appeal for freedom of religion in countries where this is needed (see *Recommendation*, n. 5).

Formation in Dialogue

In the Initial Formation programs of Missionary Religious Institutes one can find visits to, live-in experiences with, and seminars on other religions. Also, the missionary-related schools of theology, such as the *Maryhill School of Theology* of CICM, where I have been teaching for a while, as well as Mission Seminaries, offer courses on missiology, theology of religions, the study of various religions, and on dialogue. The study of other religions is much needed in Asia. Without a proper education in the field of interreligious dialogue one risks to do more harm to the mission than good (see *Recommendation*, n. 3). Only together with people of other religions, wherever possible, can one work for a new world in which God’s love becomes visible (see *Recommendation*, n. 4). (Contribution from *Fr. Peter Baekelmans*, CICM)²⁷

²⁶ Most of the dioceses have a dialogue committee and hold interreligious meetings and prayer services on a regular basis.

²⁷ Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, is Director of SEDOS in Rome, and teaches Buddhism, Hinduism, and Eastern Religions at the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain (KU Leuven),

Experience from Africa

Dialogue with Islam and African Traditional Religion

Addressing the theme of dialogue, especially inter-religious dialogue in Africa’s context, given its incredible vitality, its geographical, cultural and religious diversity, and the multiple external influences, political, economic and religious, is a challenge in itself! This is especially true when dealing with different historical contexts.

However, this is only one facet of a larger, richer, more diversified reality. In this contribution, we will look at the experience of the Missionaries of Africa, M.Afr., better known as the “White Fathers”. This nickname is significant because Mgr. Lavigerie, the Archbishop of Algiers who founded the Congregation in 1868 in Algeria in the Maghreb context, instructed the White Fathers to be all things to all people, and to dress like the local population, i.e. dressed in a white cloak (*gandoura*) with red hat (*chechia*), which eventually became their “religious” habit. Mgr. Lavigerie, a son of his time and of his cultural background, had to revise his view – and that of others – with regard to Islam. He therefore asked the White Fathers and the “White Sisters” (Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa, MSOLA, founded in 1869), to learn Arabic and Kabyle and immerse themselves in the dialogue of life with the local population while discovering the treasures of the local culture. Furthermore, the linguistic and cultural research work carried out under the pastoral direction of Fr Henri Marchal, as well as the personal experience and influence of Fr. Charles de Foucauld and Fr. Louis Massignon transformed their perception of the followers of Islam. *Together on the journey to God! And, all need to be*

Belgium. He has been a missionary for 20 years in Japan. As part of the Ph.D. program in Theology of Religions, he took part in ritual practices of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism and in Zen-meditation training.

converted to God! This apostolic approach was mostly lived in mutually respectful dialogue in everyday life and action through the opening of schools, technical and professional institutes, and documentation centres. The *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*, founded in 1921 in Tunis, was established to offer specific education in Islam and to provide a platform for theological exchanges. In 1964, the formation component was transferred to Rome and is known today as the PISAI (*Pont. Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies*). The confreres, formed in North Africa in Carthage, were then sent to sub-Saharan Africa, and instructed to learn the languages and religious customs of the people where they lived. An initial six months of language learning was provided everywhere. This explains the establishment of many language learning centres (Faladje, Mali; Guiloungo, Burkina Faso; Kipalapala, Tanzania; Ilondola, Zambia). The emphasis, depending on the context and the time, was more on the African Traditional Religion, than on the relationship with Muslims. It has proven difficult today to enter into dialogue with Muslims in Africa without paying attention to dialogue with the adherents of the African Traditional Religion.

Dialogue with the African Traditional Religion varies according to time,²⁸ place, region, and people. “Tabula rasa”, tolerance, curiosity, respect and appreciation are all present. Research centres and museums to preserve the cultural heritage were opened in Sikasso, Mali and Mua, Malawi.

Many Missionaries of Africa, who trained in Islam, remain at the service of the various diocesan and national commissions and continue to train catechists, teachers, lay people and pastoral workers. The IFIC (*Institut de formation Islamo-chrétienne*) in Bamako, Mali, and IRDIS (*Institute for*

Interreligious Dialogue and Islamic Studies) in Nairobi, Kenya, also further this goal.

Among the challenges to be met we identify the following:

It is necessary to keep on raising the awareness among the Missionaries of Africa and the candidates in formation that the Encounter and Dialogue in relation to JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) are basic elements of missionary life and not an “extra” at the pastoral level! Already the change in the socio-economic, political-military-religious context clearly requires that pastoral priorities be re-examined.

In Africa, there is the politicisation of religion and the effervescence and omnipresence of religiosity at all levels of life: preaching on public transport; broadcasting of films, video clips and audio; and loudspeakers blaring the preaching. Proselytism (forcing the other to convert at all costs) is widespread.

Confronted with religious radicalisation, fundamentalism, extremism, fanaticism, recourse to violence and hateful generalisations (*EG*, n. 253) on both sides, living in dialogue with believers who reject violence is indispensable and necessary. The witness of the Blessed Martyrs of Algeria²⁹ and of so many Christians together with other believers who live the dialogue of journeying together, enriching each other, deepening their faith by living the values of goodness, charity and peace, is an encouragement to us all.

In the current African context, it is extremely urgent to train pastoral workers “to be true ‘people of dialogue’, to co-operate in building peace, not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators” (*Fratelli Tutti*, n. 284).

(Contribution from *Fr. Andreas Göpfert*, M.Afr.)³⁰

²⁸ Dialogue with Traditional African Religion within the Catholic Church. Please consult: “Pastoral Attention to Followers of African Traditional Religion” (Card. F. Arinze, 1988); “Pastoral Attention to Followers of Traditional Religion” (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican 1993).

²⁹ A group of nineteen Missionaries slain in Algeria between 1994 and 1996 during the Algerian Civil War. They were religious men and women belonging to religious missionary congregations, including Bishop Pierre Claverie, OP; four Missionaries of Africa; and seven Trappist Cistercian monks.

³⁰ Fr. Andreas Göpfert, M.Afr., is a Missionary of

Experience from North America

Supporting the Dialogue through Education

Institutionally speaking, the Society of Jesus' commitment to and activities in interreligious dialogue can be dated to the fifth decree of its *Thirty-Fourth General Congregation* in 1995, "*Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*." Two quotations may indicate the decree's flavor:

Some Jesuits . . . are actively engaged. Their own faith has been deepened and shared with others, and their respect for the spirituality of other religions has grown. But given the task ahead, their number is inadequate. (#10)

The contemplation of God laboring in all things helps us to discover the divine spirit in religions and cultures. . . . The Jesuit heritage of creative response to the call of the Spirit in concrete situations of life is an incentive to develop a culture of dialogue in our approach to believers of other religions. This culture of dialogue should become a distinctive characteristic of our Society (#17)

The Canadian/U.S.A. Provincials therefore asked Fr. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., to organize an *Assistancy Committee on Interreligious Dialogue*, which he did in 1999. It met yearly for the next fifteen years, with at least one member, Jesuit or lay, from each of the eleven Provinces. Fr. Clooney was succeeded as Coordinator by Dr. John Borelli in 2004, who resigned recently after fifteen years. The meetings fostered strong mutual support, a networking for planned events, and many great ideas.

Africa. He is the International Coordinator of Encounter-Dialogue and JPIC for his Congregation. He has been a missionary for 20 years in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. His field covers mainly *Peace education and Conflict management and transformation*.

To speak of *present* highpoints, institutional and personal, of Jesuit work for dialogue in North America:

Georgetown University: Its now 20-year President John DiGioia made Interreligious Dialogue from the beginning one of his four pillars of Catholic identity at Georgetown. He hired Dr. John Borelli in 2004 as Special Assistant to the President for Catholic Identity and Dialogue (organizing many PCID and other events). And during this time the Theology Department established its first graduate program — the Ph.D. in Religious Pluralism, with reputed Professors such as Fr. Peter Phan, Fr. Daniel Madigan, S.J. (Islam), and Fr. Leo Lefebure (Buddhism).

Boston College: In the Theology Department, Fr. Francis Clooney, S.J. (Ph. D. Hinduism) set up the field of *Comparative Theology* and established it, with Dr. Catherine Cornille and others, as a very lively Theology Ph.D. option at Boston College. Two of Clooney's many books are *Hindu God, Christian God* and *His Hiding Place Is Darkness*. He is now at Harvard University.

Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University (in Berkeley): Fr. Anh Q. Tran, S.J., and Dr. Thomas Cattoi are outstanding young theologians and experts in dialogue with Buddhism. Dr. Cattoi holds the Dwan Family Chair in Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue.

Toronto: Fr. J.P. Horrigan, S.J., a veteran of the Darjeeling India Mission, has a very active ministry of interfaith and interreligious dialogue, and is the liaison with the Toronto Tamil community.

Philadelphia: In the 1960's Fr. Donald Clifford, S.J., and his dear Jewish friends started what has developed impressively into the *Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations* of Saint Joseph's University. It is very active and highly professional, as well as good-

hearted, under the directorship of Theology Professor Philip A. Cunningham.

The Future: A significant number of young Jesuits are interested in Islam. I am not sure about Jesuits studying Hinduism or Buddhism, but there are certainly *many* lay professors, male and female, from the Jesuit university graduate programs and elsewhere. To help assure this, some funds from the Provincials continue to support the yearly “Engaging Particularities” Conference, run by grad students of the Comparative Theology Program at Boston College (and open to other grad students), and to sponsor a breakfast at the yearly Catholic Theological Society of America meeting for interreligious dialogue, scholars, etc.

Witness: To respond to our theme of ‘witness’, let me report on my most important Hindu-Christian dialogue of this (and every) year. For the past twenty-two years I, as a Christian but also as an expert on Hinduism, have participated, with twenty or so others (half of us are Christian, half Hindu), in a Vaishnava (Hindu)-Christian Dialogue, started by John Borelli and Anuttama Das (Secretary for *Communications of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness*). This year our theme was “*Love of God in Union and Separation in Christianity and Hinduism*,” and I presented the Christian side, while my friend Rukmini Walker represented the Vaishnava side. I asked everyone to read, in preparation, passages from St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta, while Rukmini sent us passages from the *Shri Chaitanya Charitamrita*, the *Brahma Samhita*, and the *Ujjvala Nilamani*. The two of us then, in turn, carefully presented instances and themes of love of God in union and in separation. The passages were well received, which then led to an open discussion of these topics and examples for 3-4 hours. Since most of us have known each other now for 15-20 years, we go very deep with our questions and comments. We end

with a Christian service and a Hindu service, both with enthusiastic singing.

And lastly, I like to quote a thought of Fr. Noel Sheth, S.J., one of the leaders in the Hindu-Christian dialogue in India, relevant to dialogue and witness in North America (and India). He said to me in an email, two years before his untimely death in 2017: “Jim, please make sure you keep the Hindu-Christian dialogue going well in America, since it is more and more difficult these days to do so in India.”

(Contribution from *Fr. James D. Redington, SJ*)³¹

Experience from South America

From Dialogue to Interreligious Social Action

We find in the South American context a significant multiplicity and diversity of religious expressions. In addition to Catholicism and Protestantism, practically present since the arrival of the European colonizers, there are various other religious expressions originating from Indigenous, African and traditions from other continents that are deeply rooted in our cultures. All this amalgam of interaction constitutes a considerable wealth at the beginning of the 21st century.

Social, cultural, economic and political conflict permeates the life of our South American societies. The various religious confessions are not only affected by, but also play an important role in the configuration of societies in their most diverse expressions. Not always do the construction of citizenship

³¹ James D. Redington, S.J., is Adjunct Professor of Interreligious Dialogue and Hinduism at the University of Scranton, U.S.A. He studied for 3-4 years under a guru in India as part of his Ph.D. program in Hinduism; and spent six years in Zimbabwe, Africa, to be on the founding faculty of Arrupe University in Harare, at which one of his courses was on ‘The Philosophy and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue’.

processes that value human dignity and respect for cultural and religious diversity, characterize our societies. Sometimes the conflict between religious denominations, mixed with antagonistic political perspectives, influences, fosters dissent and hinders harmonious and constructive relationships in society.

Another phenomenon in the region is the Neo-Pentecostal groups. They appear almost from nowhere, grow rapidly, and normally rely on a fairly traditional theology, occupying significant areas in the social media. They tend to respond to immediate expectations (healing, financial success, and others). They are usually locked in their world with little availability for interreligious dialogue. Countries such as Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia have high concentrations of Indigenous people who are evangelicals.

There are innumerable popular religious manifestations that exceed the borders of instituted religiosity. For example, in Brazil the celebration of Our Lady of the Navigators (February 2) is also celebrated by Afro-Brazilian cults as the Feast of Iemanjá. It is interesting to observe in the same procession devotees of Iemanjá and Nuestra Señora de los Navegantes in Porto Alegre participating in the same event. Another example is the Catholics and followers of Candomblé washing the steps of the Church of Our Lord of Bonfim, in Salvador (Bahia). How should one evaluate and dialogue with those religious manifestations deeply rooted in popular culture?

In this context, a first and important aspect is to recognize religious diversity and its impact on personal and social life. In a region with a strong predominance of Christian denominations, including Catholicism and Neo-Pentecostalism, it is not always easy to accept religious expressions from Indigenous, African or other cultures. There is still a long way to go to overcome historical preconceptions which may be manifested by intolerance, even reaching forms of violence.

Interreligious dialogue is a challenge to all religious groups. Breaking down barriers and expanding horizons is essential in order to contribute to the construction of a more just, fraternal and supportive society. The problems such as poverty, social inequality and those related to Mother Earth can only be approached, or at least addressed, with the participation and commitment of everyone, including the various religious groups. The important educational processes carried out by various religious confessions and Missionary Religious Institutes, such as the De La Salle Brothers, promote respectful openness, sincere dialogue and recognition of fundamental rights, among which the religious freedom to practice and witness to one's own religion is foremost.

After having pondered on the subject of religious diversity and interreligious dialogue, I would like to conclude with two concrete examples.

Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Chile

Regarding interreligious dialogue in Chile, an interesting evolution can be noted. Since the 19th century it has been customary to celebrate a mass with *Te Deum* every September 18, the national holiday for Independence. In the Cathedral of Santiago, the President of the Republic attended the Mass with parliamentary and judicial authorities as well as the diplomatic corps. In 1970, the newly elected President Salvador Allende asked the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, to celebrate Independence Day without mass, retaining the *Te Deum* but with an ecumenical character. Since then, that tradition has been maintained, with a homily by the Archbishop, a large choir and orchestra. Another change in this act of prayer occurred when the Archbishop began to invite the Chief Rabbi. Shortly afterwards, a Muslim was also invited to pray for Chile. The ceremony went *from ecumenical to interreligious*.

On 18th of October 2019, a social crisis erupted throughout the country with the

simultaneous burning of ten metropolitan railway stations, and the destruction of traffic lights in urban centers, looting of commercial businesses, and the setting fire to temples, churches, rural schools, etc. A Christian and Patriotic campaign emerged to face the social crisis in a peaceful way. Recalling the participation of Jews and Muslims at the *Te Deum* in the diocesan cathedral, the campaign was called *The Interreligious and Patriotic Campaign*. Serious social situations have led *from interreligious prayer to interreligious social action* in Chile.

National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil

The *National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil* (CONIC) was founded in 1982 in Porto Alegre. It was the result of a long process of consultation of the Christian Churches of Brazil. Its mission is to strengthen the ecumenical witness of the Churches that compose it, foster interreligious dialogue and promote dialogue with civil society organizations and the government for public advocacy in favor of policies that promote justice and peace. One of the main actions carried out by CONIC is the *Ecumenical Fraternity Campaigns* which are carried out throughout the country during the Lenten Season. The theme for this year 2021 is *“Fraternity and Dialogue: commitment of love”* and the motto is *“Christ is our peace: from what was divided he made a unity”* (cfr. Eph 2:14). Through actions like this, the Council of Christian Churches of Brazil has kept ecumenical and interreligious dialogue alive, taking an active part in the life of the country on fundamental issues for society.

(Contribution from Bro. Edgar Nicodem, FSC)³²

³² Bro. Edgar Nicodem, FSC, is a La Salle Brother. He holds a Master Degree in Theology, has been the Director of Novices, and was till two years ago the Provincial of the La Salle Brazil-Chile Province. He is very interested in JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) and IRD (Interreligious Dialogue) activities.

Experience from Europe

A Process of Self-Emptying

Part of Global Mission

The Medical Mission Sisters see interreligious relationship as an inherent part of their identity, personally and communally. Dr. Anna Dengel, the Foundress, spoke about a ‘grateful mutuality’ among Christians, Hindus and Muslims. *“The more gratefully we honour ... in them Christ, and honour in them the work of the Holy Spirit, the more are we able to discover their inner resources”*.

From the very beginning their Healing Mission included communication, collaboration and celebration of life and faith with people from all religions and traditions. The goal was and is the *transformation* of individuals, communities and unjust structures.

Part of Healing Mission (Berlin)

The mentally sick refugees, among whom are Muslims, Hindus and others in hospital, suffer deep traumas when their families are torn apart and their children lost. Where there are no words to communicate with, understanding happens with signs of ‘hands and feet’. One symbol speaks to all religions: lighting a candle in front of Mary, the mother of the Prophet Jesus, who also lost a child.

Turning to *the resource of faith* eases suffering. Muslims feel ‘at home’ when calling upon “Allah” together. Making room for prayer, letting go and handing over the suffering, enkindles hope, relieves pain and strengthens faith.

Creating Space for Interreligious Dialogue (Frankfurt)

Creating space for interreligious dialogue challenges us to live with the paradoxes and the grey zones of the liminal spaces that open us to transformation and growth. Therefore, interreligious dialogue has the fragility and power of a “sign” of the

Kingdom of God in today's divided, fragmented, and conflictual world.

In the *Centre for Christian Meditation* people from all religions and world views are welcome. The centre is a diocesan church that has been set aside for this kind of pastoral work. The art of meditation and spirituality is the centre's main focus.

A pastoral team, including some of our Medical Mission Sisters, work there to encourage the dialogue between Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. It organizes among others Zen-meditations, interreligious days of 'Silence', exercising Qi Gong, Yoga and Yoga Nidra, meditative archery and traditional meditative dancing.

Here, the journey of faith becomes *a process of self-emptying*, letting go of what is hindering the dialogue and integrating novel aspects from others in order to give birth to an interreligious culture of dialogue.

Taking Initiatives (Duisburg)

Catholic, Protestant and Muslim women started a *Forum for Intercultural Information and Education* in Duisburg, called "*Women of All Nations Invite You*", to promote honest, direct dialogue for mutual understanding and tolerance across religious and cultural barriers.

Celebrating the Breaking of the Muslim Fast (*Ramadan*) in a Catholic Parish Hall, followed by sharing information about Christian and Muslim fasting was an initial 'sacred moment'. The women felt mutually enriched and a deep desire to journey together and to live a common cause as they discovered so many similarities.

Interreligious online-prayers were initiated prior to the Solemnity of the Ascension of Christ on the "Night of Destiny", when Muslims commemorate the revelation of parts of the Koran to the Prophet Mohammad. Due to the pandemic, the interreligious prayer gathering in the Mosque was not allowed. Thus, the interreligious prayer online brought courage, hope and confidence to the women in distress. The prayers continue.

Learnings

Getting to know each other: The dialogue of life happens in informal meetings where daily life is shared, people get to know each other and also learn about their prayers and celebrations. The discovery of commonalities and to realise that one's prejudices are not correct is important.

Living Solidarity: Similar values and concerns can lead to joint activities. Personal and communal commitments help to live worldwide solidarity. During the "World Day of the Poor", which took place during the Muslim Fast, the women undertook to cook for homeless and disadvantaged people at a Christian-based centre once a week.

Praying together: In the past, Christians, Jews and Muslims said their prayers one after the other. During the pandemic, the Muslim women asked for an interfaith prayer as "our common interreligious" prayer. Here prayers and texts – prepared carefully by one person from each tradition – were recited by all the women.

Disturbances: Political conflicts in the countries of origin do not stop at the national borders and can hinder co-operation in interreligious dialogue or peace prayers where there are tensions. Sensitivity is required as well as compassion, patience and forgiveness born of a long loving look at all partners.

(Contribution from Sr. Agnes Lanfermann, MMS)³³

³³ Sr. Agnes Lanfermann, MMS, is the former Superior General of the Medical Mission Sisters. At present, she is consultant for consecrated life in the Diocese of Limburg, Germany.

Experience from Oceania

Dialogue among Christian Churches

Oceania, the so-called 'liquid continent', includes Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and seventeen other small countries. The people in Australia and New Zealand are mostly migrants from other countries but the first citizens are Aborigines in Australia and Maoris in New Zealand. Most of the people of the other countries in the Pacific are indigenous people.

The *Pacific Conference of Churches* (PCC) was founded in 1966 and it includes most of the countries of Oceania. The *Catholic Episcopal Conference of Pacific* (CECP) and the *Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands* (CBC-PNGSI) are also full members of the Pacific Conference of Churches. Australia and New Zealand have an ecumenical desk and *inter-religious dialogue commissions* in their own respective Conferences of Catholic Bishops. The Pacific Conference of Churches has 27-member churches in 17 island states and its offices are in Suva, Fiji. The basic principles of the Pacific Conference of Churches aim at the ecumenical unity not only of the churches, but also of the people of the Pacific; promotion of justice, peace and the integrity of creation; the respect of equality between men and women and equal sharing of resources. The Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches' members takes place every five years. The writer was privileged to attend two of those Assemblies.

The *Papua New Guinea Council of Churches* (PNGCC), which was founded in 1965, has the seven mainline churches as its members. Its mission is: "as members of the one family of God and by witnessing together we are proclaiming the unity to which God calls us". Ecumenical unity was not very easy in the early years. After Independence in 1975, many Pentecostal churches and local churches started springing up like mushrooms. "Sheep-stealing" has become

very common in Papua New Guinea, which is 96% Christian.

In 2004, the Australian Government established the Australian Aid Partnership with Churches in Papua New Guinea called *Church Partnership Program* (CPP) recognizing the role the churches play in the development of the local communities especially in sustainable livelihoods, employment training, education and health. The Australian Government gives funding for the development program through the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches. This has proven to be helping the communities directly. Indirectly, it has helped the churches in Papua New Guinea to work together; ecumenical unity is becoming real and alive through this Church Partnership Program.

The *Melanesian Institute* for research in Melanesian culture was established by the some of the leaders of the Missionary Religious Institutes, such as SVD, MSC, and SM, in Goroka in 1970. In the same year the *Wantok Newspaper* in Pidgin language was published in Papua New Guinea by Fr. Frank Mihalic, SVD, which later became an ecumenical project of four churches: Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and United Church. The Melanesian countries are: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, West Papua and New Caledonia. Most of the people in Melanesia were animists until Christianity came 150-200 years ago. In primeval cultures it is difficult to separate religion from culture. "The Melanesians believed in what we would class as miracles, in things they saw in dreams, in visions seen while awake, in magic, in witchcraft, in good and bad spirits.... Belief in some kind of high or supreme spirit or god, could be present in the culture, but was not central to it".³⁴ The Melanesian Institute's main purpose is to engage in fostering the Gospel values found within the context of this Melanesian cultural

³⁴ Fr. Franco Zocca, SVD, *Melanesia and its Churches*, 2007, p. 35.

world-view and within the tradition and teaching of the member churches.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands has a *Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue* and it holds meetings with the leaders from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism although they are very small in number in PNG. In the past 20 years there has been an increase in the number of Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Buddhists in PNG. Radical Muslims are a threat in PNG too. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of PNGSI has a Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue and it has three meetings a year with the leaders of the Catholic, Lutheran, United, Anglican Churches, and of the Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and Judaic traditions. (Contribution from *Fr. Victor Roche, SVD*)³⁵

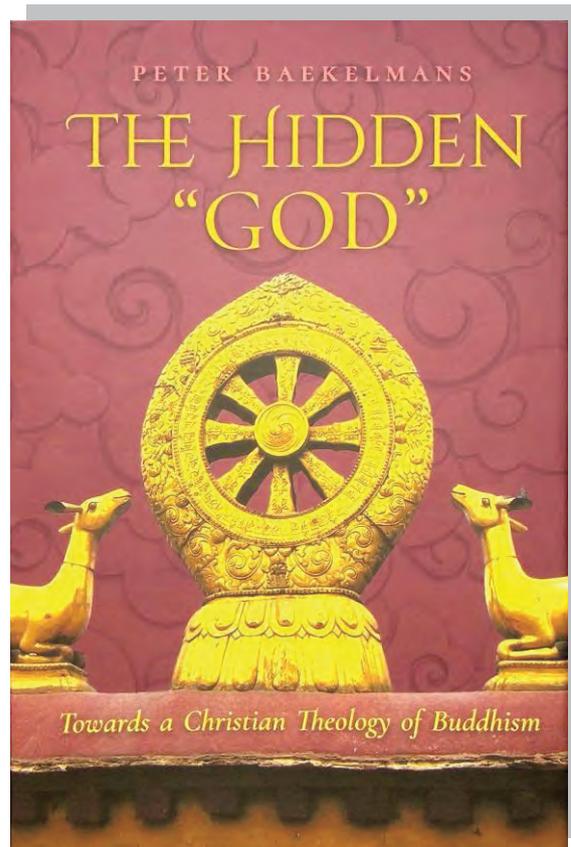
Conclusion

Summarizing all the efforts for dialogue made by the Religious Missionary Institutes is an impossible task, but the above contributions give us a glimpse of the current trends in dialogue: in Asia there is the effort to keep the fire burning; in Europe and North America there is the challenge to enter into dialogue with modern spiritualities that are mostly based on Eastern religious traditions; in South America the surge of Pentecostal movements makes a long-lasting engagement difficult; in Africa the dialogue with Traditional African Religion, and in Oceania with the Aboriginal tradition, has started. The different contributions show that Missionary Religious Institutes are doing their best to dialogue with other religions according to the Recommendations in the document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue that we are celebrating here with this

publication: *Ten Years Since "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct", Looking Back, Looking Ahead.*

(**Ref.:** Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K. (ed.), *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, pp. 141-157).

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(Fr. Dr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, former Director of SEDOS, has recently published a book on the concept of god within Buddhism. It is based on his long experience in the dialogue with and the study of Buddhism. *The Hidden "God", Towards a Christian Theology of Buddhism*, Angelico Press, 2022 (See, [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)).

³⁵ Fr. Victor Roche, SVD, has been working in Papua New Guinea for the past 40 years and as the General Secretary of the *Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands* (PNGSI) for eight years (2010-2018). In this contribution, he writes of his experience in Inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue in PNGSI and Melanesia, which includes most of the countries in Oceania.

Summary of the SEDOS Residential Seminar 2022

Monday, 9 May 2022

At the Opening Session, the participants who were present in person gathered outside the hall, in front of the Lake of Albano, to exchange greetings, pray and reflect on our call as *fishers of men*. A little boat was made to symbolize our journey as missionaries, from the time of formation to becoming a formator ourselves, and serving in different liturgical situations.



Sharing during the opening ceremony

Afterwards, all those present (about 40) and those on-line (about 120) were addressed by SEDOS President Fr. Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, and welcomed and oriented by SEDOS Executive Director, Peter Baekelmans, CICM. The tone was set and the participants were ushered, without delay, to the theme of the Seminar, “Formation for Mission”. Then, the week unfolded as the Speakers gave their insightful lectures full of experience and wisdom, with the prayers, group discussions, and the Eucharistic celebrations. Everything was shared in an informal manner and that made this a truly inspirational Seminar, one which sent us forth to our communities – but more especially, to our Formation Houses – encouraged and full of zeal.

The opening lecture was given by Prof. Rev. Luca Pandolfi, entitled, “Intercultural Competence in Missionary Formation”. He immediately highlighted the fact that we sometimes tend to mix inter-culturality with multi-culturalism. In the latter case, one can take people from different backgrounds *living together* in the same community (multi-culturality/ interculturality) **to refer** to the relationship of the members of these communities (inter-culturality), the *process of interaction and integration*, and how their diversity can enrich the other. The best form of formation in this respect is that based on cooperation and experience, in which thoughts and culture are shared, actions/projects chosen, lived and realized together.

Tuesday, 10 May 2022

This day started with Sr. Nicole Houinato, OLA, Sr. Nirmala Arul, IBVM, Fr. Juan Gabriel Corona Estévez, MSC, and Mr. Oliver Aquilina, SDC, sharing on the theme, “What helped me in becoming a missionary, and what sustained my vocation”. The four participants took us all back to their experiences in the past, the experience that made an impact on their missionary call. One way or another, they referred to their relationship with God, their personal prayer life, a particular verse in Holy Scripture that seemed written for them, how they grew up in their families, their contact with other missionaries from a young age. The main sources of sustenance for the four Speakers were their daily loyalty to the Call, the importance of prayer without ceasing as they became “fishers of men/women”, and the blessing of healthy communities that accompanied them faithfully.

In the following lecture, Fr Antonio Pernia, SVD, talked to us about “The Importance of fostering the Missionary Spirit”. First, Fr Antonio explored the nuances contained in the expression “missionary spirit”, namely, the person of the missionary, missionary spirituality, and “missio Spiritus”, or the mission of the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of mission. In the second part, Fr Antonio indicated some of the fundamental characteristics of the missionary spirit, taking into consideration the implications of today’s mission paradigm, i.e. the understanding of mission as “missio Dei”, or God’s mission. Here he elaborated upon contemplation, dialogue, humility, cooperation and joy as the attitudes required of the missionary.

Later in the afternoon, we focused on the Gospels, and Prof. Em. Sr. Maria Ha Fong Ko, FMA, shared an edifying reflection as she tackled the question: “How did Jesus form his disciples to become missionaries?” The missionary spirit can be seen in Jesus who regularly invites people to – *come, stay, go*, — while making use of metaphors to describe the workers as he saw them during his time and beyond *farmer, fisherman, shepherd*. Jesus instructed his disciples, a community of twelve men with different characters, whom he entrusted with the great mission. He does the same thing with us today, and he knows that if we are faithful to him, living in unity, this diversity contributes to communities that are more beautiful, enriched, dynamic, that probably reap more fruit through their mission.

Wednesday, 11 May 2022

After Morning Prayer, the first reflection of the day was on, “Growth in Educational Mission Through the Lens of the Formation for Mission Framework”, which Bro. Rey Mejias, FSC, gave. Based on his personal experience, he sees formation as a process that unfolds in the course of one’s response to the on-going action

of God in one’s life. Here, formation helps one to take responsibility for such a process, and it encompasses five domains/steps:

- 1) seeing with the eyes of faith,
- 2) initiation in prayer,
- 3) formation in freedom,
- 4) formation in association, friendship and solidarity, and
- 5) care for the world.

He suggested that one should regard one’s life as a process of on-going formation with God as the principal “Formator”. God addresses the trainees through the needs and challenges of daily life, inviting them to grow as they cooperate with his Saving Plan.

In the second lecture, “Interculture as a *sine qua non* in Formation”, Prof. Severino Elias Ngoenha, said that “interculturalism” is neither assimilation, nor acculturation/multiculturalism, and that it goes beyond co-existing with some indifference. Using the metaphors of *two knitting needles* and that of an orchestra, Prof. Ngoenha compared the work of the formator for mission today to a knitted fabric that results in a beautiful sweater, or the variety of instruments in an orchestra that create a wonderful symphony.

In the following lecture later, Prof. Sr. Enrica Ottone, FMA, spoke about “Inter-culturality in Multicultural Formation Communities”. Inter-culturality was thus treated further. As Prof. Ottone outlined her research on the topic and its results, she once more stressed the difference between multi-culturalism and inter-culturality, and acknowledged the challenges that formators face. She made some suggestions, such as: attentive listening, developing an integral vision of



Participants listening the Lectures

intercultural competences, organizing workshops to promote the ability to manage emotions, stereotypes and prejudices, promoting critical knowledge and skills to comprehend one's own culture and that of others, as well as spending time in formal, non-formal and informal activities to encourage exchanges and interaction.

In the last lecture of the day, Mary L. Gautier talked to us about, "Lessons taken from International Sisters in the United States". This was based on a study held in 2015 and 2016 among 4,000 international sisters in the US, to learn about the challenges and rewards of their experience. The study underlined the challenges the international Sisters face, such as food, weather and unfamiliar customs. But the international Sisters' story is not one only of difficulties encountered and challenges overcome. They enrich the Church in the U.S. as they bring an international awareness to Sisters, who have been for too long inward-looking and culturally closed off, through diversity in prayer and worship styles, and the gift of intercultural understanding.

Thursday, 12 May 2022

After Morning Prayer, the day continued with a sharing from a panel made up of Fr. Leo Laurence Maria Joseph, MSC, Jean-Jacques Mukanga, SMA, Sr. Jesmin Fernando, SFB, Brigitte Muanda, ICM, on the theme, "What did you learn while being a formator?" Among other things, the members of the panel mentioned the vitality of self-knowledge and of coming to know God, the importance of a sound prayer life, silence and reflection, the good that there is in every person, the benefits of a healthy community, and how the Holy Spirit can be more creative than we think as he works in our trainees.

In the following lecture on "Formation and Accompaniment of Formators," Fr. Dr. Len Kofler, MHM, stressed the importance of faith and self-awareness as we learn to live in process, to take Pope Francis' statement about "smelling the sheep" seriously, and

that in formation it is not only the intellect that is being formed, but also the heart. Fr. Len also mentioned the contrast between the values of our society and those of the Gospel, the aspect of forgiveness, and the great benefits of emotional intelligence (*EQ*), spiritual intelligence (*SQ*) and caring accompaniment in formation.

The last lecture was given by Sr. Emma Paloma, ICM, on "Ongoing formation for formators who are already long on the job", in which she focused on three levels of movement. In the first, the formator is growing towards one's Real Self, blossoming to one's potential, learning to humbly accept one's limitations, and gratitude for being God's Beloved. The second movement involves growing in the Communal, Social and Ecclesial realities of the World, whereby the formator is required to trust, believe and support the young religious' hopes and dreams. In the third movement, the formator comes to a new understanding and experience of self, a new understanding of Creation, a new understanding and way of responding to God, a new understanding and experiencing of the Eucharist, and a deeper awareness of the unity and interconnectedness of all.

During the festive evening there was a local choir who sang Gospel Songs in the chapel.



Group discussions at the SEDOS Seminar

Friday, 13 May 2022

This day started with prayers as well, and afterwards, every group (five from the participants in person and five from the participants on-line) shared a short but creative presentation which highlighted what we had learned and reflected upon during the week, both during the lectures and even during our group-work.

In the morning lecture the medical doctor and General Secretary of the Comboni Missionaries, Brother Daniele Giusti, MCCJ, talked about “What did we learn as missionaries from the Covid-19 crisis?”. He shared several touching personal experiences he had had during the crisis, and the lessons he had learned, such as, the sacrifices the missionary has to make, together with humiliation, failure and helplessness. He referred to his relationship with his confreres, and the level of “hygiene of the heart”; whether his heart and gaze are pure, or tainted by prejudice. In his conclusion, Brother Daniele said that in a time of uncertainty made up of pandemics, war, food and power shortages, we need to go back to the essential. Every day he was challenged and tempted to give up, but at the same time he was sustained day after day by the presence of the Lord, our Redeemer, who is at work, tirelessly, to make everything new.



The SEDOS President and Vice-President thanking Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, for his excellent work as Director of SEDOS.

The closing address was given by Fr. Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, SEDOS President. He introduced the new Director of SEDOS, Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD, thanked the out-going Director Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, and announced other changes in the Membership of the Executive Committee. He will end his term as President of SEDOS and he will be followed by Sr. Mary Baron, OLA. Words of thanks were expressed to all, a final Eucharistic celebration followed, and an encouraging sending ceremony at the end. Those who participated in person were delighted and enlightened by the Seminar and went home happily. The participants on-line also expressed their content.

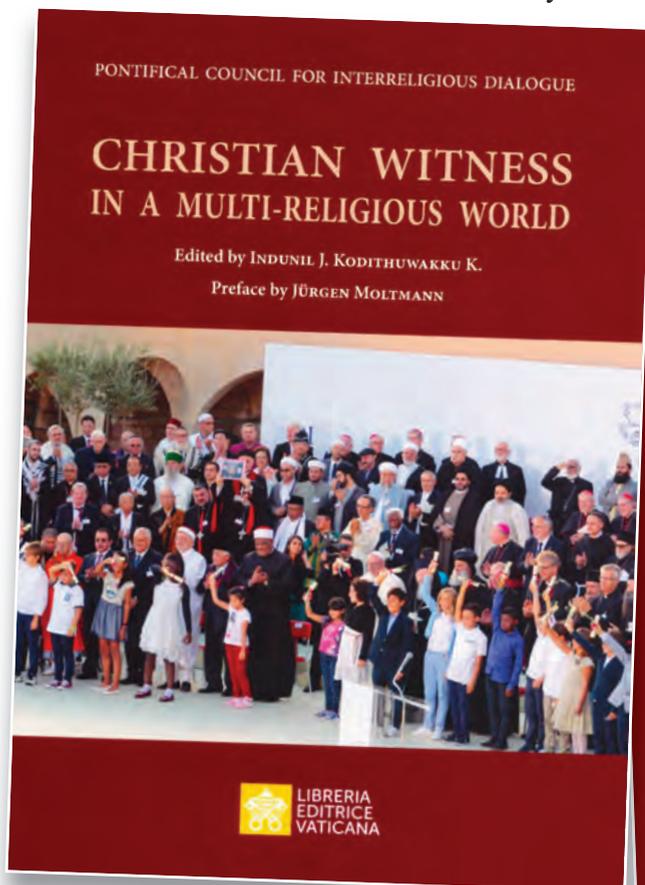


The new SEDOS Team bidding farewell to Fr. Peter



CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS WORLD

Edited by INDUNIL J. KODITHUWAKKU K.
Preface by JÜRGEN MOLTMANN



CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS WORLD

This book is published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the historic document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in 2011. This landmark document on interreligious and ecumenical dialogue is considered unique and also one of the most widely received ecumenical texts in recent history.

The aim of this current publication is to explore anew historical, theological and missiological perspectives of Christian mission in a multi-religious world as well as thematic and contemporary issues related to it. Accordingly, in this book, representatives of the Catholic Church, the WCC, the WEA, and Global Christian Forum, together with a few companions from Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, reflect and discuss ecumenical and interreligious ways and means to iron out prejudices, to heal past wounds, and to work together to foster a more fraternal world. Another feature of this volume is its interdisciplinary focus – history, sociology, diplomacy, education, justice-related issues, and peace studies.

Due to increased interreligious and intra-religious tensions and conflicts in recent decades, fraternity and social friendship have emerged as new keystones to the paradigm of mission. This book proposes a roadmap to convert enmity to amity through the transformative power of dialogue and cooperation. Therefore, it represents a major contribution to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in a multi-religious world; it is of great contemporary relevance to anyone interested in fostering a culture of encounter.

