

Traditional Communities, New Communities: Strengths, Challenges and Areas of Convergence

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Day of *meeting-dialogue*
between tradiional and new communities

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“To live and promote dialogue between traditional and new communities to build the Church together in unity” (Mission statement of the CRC’s Committee on dialogue between traditional and new communities)

As some of you may know, I have been working with new communities for almost 15 years³. I am frequently asked: How can a Dominican, a member of an ancient order founded 800 years ago, be so interested in new communities⁴? My answer lies in three great convictions, which I’d like to share with you from the outset. This will help you to place my presentation in context and especially to understand why I find it so important to build bridges between us.

My first conviction can be expressed by an African proverb that says: *“You must weave the new cord to the old one”*. In other words, when we look at the history of the Church, and especially of religious life, nothing seems to emerge all of a sudden, without relation to what took place beforehand. We all are heirs to a past. I extend an invitation to those of us who are from traditional and new communities to be more mindful of historical continuities than historical ruptures⁵. The things we have in common far outweigh those that could put some distance between us.

Second conviction: I believe in the coexistence of the old and the new. Recently, a reporter asked me: *“In your opinion, will new communities come to replace traditional communities?”*⁶ And I told him, No. *Vita consecrata*, the apostolic exhortation written following the Bishops Synod on Consecrated Life in 1994, goes precisely in that direction. And I quote, *“In this newness however the Spirit does not contradict himself. Proof of this is the fact that the new forms of consecrated life have not supplanted the earlier ones”* (VC 12). The document underlines the fact that both traditional and new communities are called to show *“how the gifts of the Holy Spirit complement one another”* (VC 12). I am absolutely convinced that older charisms can yield new fruit. After all, an old apple tree does not produce old apples!

This brings me to a third conviction: we are building today what we are going to be in the Church of tomorrow. In these last decades, traditional and new communities have worked in an almost perfectly symmetrical parallelism. We met from time to time, often around the issue of financial support, but without any real future prospects in common. That period is over! Why? Because we belong to the same Church, in the same environment and are engaged in the same project. Because of this environment, in Québec in particular, we belong to a Church that is becoming the purview of a minority of citizens. We are leaving Christendom behind, i.e. a society dominated by Catholicism, to enter into a state of mission. In this new environment, we face a new challenge: *“new evangelization”*⁷. However, this new evangelization can only be fruitful under certain conditions. One of them has to do with the relationships among us. The problem in the future will not be our reduced numbers. The risk that we will run is to be a dislocated Church, separate

rather than united and complementary in our differences. If we do not learn how to dialogue together today, we will have problems tomorrow. And these problems will be inherited by the next generations. This is why sustaining this dialogue between us seems of paramount importance to me. It is an investment for the future.

It is against the background of these three convictions that I would like to address the topic of dialogue between traditional and new communities. Three attitudes are the preliminary steps to dialogue. First, a desire to meet. Here we are! Then, choosing to cultivate a favourable attitude towards one another. I haven't heard derogatory comments yet! And finally, to agree to shed the truth, in all humility, about oneself and on the other. None us belongs to a perfect community. We all have our strengths, just as we have our weaknesses and especially challenges to take up.

In this talk, I am pursuing two goals. First, to draw up a comparison of the strengths and challenges that every network, traditional and new communities, presents for you. I believe it is important, at the early stages of dialogue, to know what we are going through on both sides, in real terms. My second objective is to highlight the areas of convergence that exist between us. We are different, but also complementary. And that is a great asset for the Church. It will ultimately be from these areas of convergence that a common future could be foreseen.

I have organized my observations around three essential areas of our lives: our spiritual life; our community life; and finally, our commitment to the mission of the Church.

I have just mentioned the Church. One note on this: dialogue between us resides in the communion of the Church⁸. This is something that the organizing committee for this day wanted to highlight unequivocally by inviting the local bishop, Mgr Raymond St-Gelais, to give the message we have heard this morning. As communities, let us not exist for ourselves only. We exist in and for the Church. I find it important to state it clearly at the beginning of this reflection.

1. OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

Let me begin with the most important aspect of our lives. The very one that forms the basis of the bonds we are developing between ourselves: Jesus Christ and our spiritual life.

1.1 New Communities: Strengths and Challenges

Strength: a life of sustaining and inviting prayer

An outstanding feature of the life of new communities is the importance given to a prayerful life. It is not merely a wish, but a reality anchored in time: it is not uncommon to see two or three hours devoted to individual and group prayer, daily.

This prayer seeks to sustain and is expressed in many different ways: quiet prayer and Eucharistic adoration, sung liturgy, joyous and festive prayer set to appealing tunes, a prayer that also makes room for the body and the senses through dance, biblical recitations, icons, incense, etc.

This prayer is also intended to be inviting. Prayer is not only a question of sustaining the spiritual life of the members of the community. Prayer is often open to others, to believers and non-believers alike, who are invited to share the experience of a personal meeting with the Lord through prayer. Thus, many new communities become schools of prayer as an integral part of their apostolate.

We should also note that several communities suggest a fusion of the monastic and apostolic ideals⁹. While some communities want to be mainly contemplative, others will call themselves semi-contemplative. From this point of view, at the historical level, these new communities are reviving a long-known religious form of life, that of the medieval conventual orders. These represent, in general, a combination of monastic life and canonical life that came before and the life of the apostolic congregations that will follow them.

Strength: revitalized and intersecting spiritualities

As I said in my introduction: no community can claim to be completely innovative, without any relation to our heritage. We are all heirs to the past. New communities thus inevitably borrow from the spiritual traditions inherited from the past, whether they are Benedictine, Franciscan, Carmelite, Dominican, Ignatian, or the French School of spirituality, etc.

Accordingly, the contribution of new communities is two-fold. Firstly, they can bring new breath to these old traditions. Secondly, they can import new elements that will be combined or intersect with what already exists. I am thinking specifically of the influence of the Charismatic Renewal, which was the breeding ground for several new communities. As an example, the *Communauté du Chemin Neuf* was born from a charismatic prayer group and their founder, father Laurent Fabre, is a Jesuit. He gave them the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, known as Ignatian spirituality, enriched by certain features specific to the Charismatic Renewal. On a humorous note, some members of the *Chemin Neuf* have said: “It is St. Ignatius dancing the tango with the Holy Spirit!”

Challenge: a unified spiritual identity

Quite an ambitious title! I will explain myself using a characture. I must warn you, the new community that I am going to describe does not exist, even if I used a combination of real cases as my starting point! This fictitious community claims its charism originates in Charles de Foucauld. As the founder spent some time in Carmel, it integrates the teaching of the great Carmelite figures. Then, since this is a tried and true Church method, it makes sense for all members to attend a 30-day retreat on Ignatian discernment. At the liturgical level, essentially, we have the Roman Catholic rite. But in a spirit of communion with Oriental Christians, and because of its beauty, they have also incorporated into the liturgy some elements of the Byzantine rite. Then, at the end of the prayer, the community recites an invocation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Lourdes, and the Archangel Michel.

Inevitably, not that all of these are incompatible; we are still within the traditional realm of Catholicism. However, as the saying goes: “Grasp all, lose all”. The risk is to end up with a fuzzy identity, a spiritual identity resembling a crazy quilt, a hodge-podge of spiritual traditions. It is in that sense that the unification of spiritual identity represents a challenge for certain communities.

1.2 Traditional Communities: Strengths and Challenges

Strength: heirs and transmitters of the treasures of spirituality

At the time of the Second Vatican Council reform, religious communities were invited to return to their sources, and especially to rediscover – and in some cases, to discover for the first time – the treasures of spirituality that is the legacy of their respective founding figures¹⁰. This return to the foundational charism has been a revitalizing experience for many religious communities. Some communities became schools of spirituality, spiritualities that they share today with a great number of people, in particular among the laity.

Strength: the monastic "cry"

There is a portion of the network of the traditional communities that is not represented today. They are the monastic or contemplative communities. Demographically, in the Church, men and women contemplatives form a minority, compared to men and women religious in apostolic life. In the years that followed the Council, monastic communities also experienced their share of departures. Today, having to deal with an aging membership and at the institutional level; some communities are choosing to move to places better suited to their demographic reality. Such was the case, recently, of the Cistercians of Oka who opened a new monastery in St-Jean-de-Matha, Val-Notre-Dame.

Against this background, let me share with you an intuition: I believe that in the decades to come, some monastic communities will experience a breath of Pentecost. Last year, I attended a monastic profession. The bishop who presided at the celebration addressed this point. He said, *"In this period when the death of God is being proclaimed and where religious indifference prevails, we observe at the same time an enormous thirst for spirituality. In this context, we need 'heralds', like John the Baptist, the voice who shouted in the wilderness"* (see Jn. 1: 23). From the radicalism of the monastic option, of the all-for-God, the contemplatives, both men and women, are uttering an immense existential cry in favour of God. Among the many forms of religious life, monastic life is called, in my opinion, to play an even more important role today than it has in the past. Only time will tell.

Challenge: to value "being" over "doing"

When I am asked: what is the "value" of religious life? I like to surprise my audience by answering: nothing! And I am deeply convinced of this. At least, I refuse to focus the concept of religious life on tasks to be performed. Religious life is first and foremost a love story. One enters religious life, not just "in order to" do things, but "because" of Jesus Christ beloved over all.

In some forms of apostolic life, we live in fruitful balance between union with God and union with the men and women around us. In the Dominican tradition, there is an old proverb that says, *Contemplari and contemplata aliis tradere*, which means: "to contemplate and deliver to others the fruit of one's contemplation". That is where it all begins. In apostolic communities, we may be tempted by activism. We may occasionally value "doing" over "being". I like to remember the words of Mother Teresa: *"The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life"* or the words of Paul VI: *"Do not forget the testimony of history: faithfulness to prayer or its abandonment are the test of the vitality or decadence of the religious life."* (Evangelica testificatio 42). I think that sums it up!

2. OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

2.1 New Communities: Strengths and Challenges

Strength: mixed and inter-vocational communities

New communities are called "new" for two reasons. Either because of the time of their creation; they are, in the large majority of cases¹¹, institutions that appeared after the Vatican II Council. Or because among these communities, some are innovative in terms of the forms of living they have adopted: first, there are mixed communities (made up men *and* women); second, there are communities which, in addition to being mixed, gather people in various states of life or with different vocations.

Traditional religious institutes separate men from women in distinct communities. As for states of life, all members are unmarried and consecrated to God by three vows (poverty, chastity in celibacy and obedience). Moreover, some are ordained to ministry. This traditional formula of religious life has been taken up by several new communities (*Fraternités monastiques de Jérusalem, Congrégation Saint-Jean, Petits frères de la Croix*).

But the true innovation lies in the formation of inter-vocational communities¹²: unmarried men and women consecrated to God by the three vows or their equivalent, married members – and their families, in some cases – as well as members ordained to the diaconal and presbyteral ministry. This is the case of the *Communauté du Chemin Neuf*, the *Communauté des Béatitudes*, the *Communauté de l’Emmanuel*, etc.

To hear the members themselves, mixed membership and men-women inter-dynamics within new communities seem to be a source of balance, complementariness and apostolic fruitfulness. In addition, the inter-vocational dimension of the new communities expresses, to a certain extent, the theology, and especially the ecclesiology, of Vatican II. The Council put forward the notion of the Church as God’s people and Body of Christ, one and diverse in its members¹³.

Strength: a fraternal and joyful community life

I remember a visit I paid to a new community where I arrived unexpected at mealtime: in an minute I found myself sitting at table with everyone, a chocolate cake in front of me (a weakness of mine!), and we talked at length around the table. I am not saying that this scenario is specific to new communities. I perhaps stumbled upon the right evening that week – the one where chocolate cake was served... – but this little story nevertheless reveals two characteristics that I have found in several many communities.

First, they seek to cultivate warm relationships among members and an intense community life. They spend time together, freely. Second, they also cultivate the sense of hospitality. This attracts several new members. Also noteworthy is the fact that several new communities call themselves “families”, which expresses the qualitative nature of the relationships the members wish to have.

Strength: relatively young average ages

First of all, let us steer clear of the stereotype that new communities are full of young people, and the traditional communities only have seniors! The reality is much less clear-cut. It is true that new communities have average ages generally lower than most traditional communities. It is an obvious strength, and the saying is proven true: “youth attracts youth”. Nevertheless, after 20 or 30 years of existence for the oldest (!) new communities (!), they are also starting to have elderly members. And that is a new reality for them. They have become multigenerational.

Challenge: towards a new stage of understanding connected with the Church?

In 1998, the founder of the *Communauté du Chemin Neuf*, Father Laurent Fabre, wrote an article entitled “*Traditional and new communities*”. I will quote for you a passage from his text: “*We haven’t lived through a true institutional crisis yet. That will certainly occur one day: the delicate point will undoubtedly be between couples and consecrated single people. It is the most original point but perhaps also the most fragile one*”¹⁴. In a way, Laurent Fabre predicted what is happening today, 10 years later.

The current questioning is two-fold. For new communities, the question is whether this mode of coexistence between different vocations, just as between men and women within the same community, is a viable form of life in the long run. For the Church, as an institution, its questioning

relates to the canonical framework to give these communities recognized up to now as associations of the faithful.

Two paths are likely to be explored. The first one is simpler at the institutional level. It involves breathing new life into the existing legal and canonical structures, that is to make new communities either into lay associations by excluding some of the consecrated unmarried members and ordained ministers; or creating religious institutes similar to those in existence by excluding some of the laity, especially married couples, and separating men from women. In both cases, new communities, with the originality that they have had since the 1970s, are likely to disappear. To prevent that, other possibilities should then be explored. Among those, there is a middle ground that strives to reach a legal middle ground between the association of faithful laity and the religious institute. In this case, one will attempt to include, within the association of the faithful, a religious institute bringing together consecrated celibate members. *“This solution, says Michel Dortel-Claudot, suggested often and over a long period, is rejected by the communities concerned, in the name of the unity of the whole family, bringing together people from various life states of life, to be preserved at all costs”*¹⁵. Some communities, like the *Chemin Neuf*, nevertheless chose this path. A second possibility is linked to Canon 605 of the Church’s Code of canon law. This canon considers the possibility for the Holy See to recognize new forms of consecrated life. This topic brings us to one of the most urgent questions to be addressed in terms of the theology of consecrated life, of the theology of laity, of ecclesiology and therefore in terms of the Church’s canon law.

Challenge: to cultivate an open and healthy community life

Without a doubt, a fraternal and joyful community life is among the strengths of most new communities. However, this strength has a disadvantage, as shown by some unfortunate experiences in recent years: some new communities are so intensely focused on themselves that they end up imploding. This can happen for various reasons: too great a distance between life inside the community and relations with the outside, whether with society or with the Christian communities and the local bishop; dysfunctional relations between the members themselves or with people in authority, especially with the founder.¹⁶ These are some of the elements that have caused suffering within some communities in recent years. In my opinion, this was all part of the growing pains that – let us not forget – traditional communities also went through in their day.

2.2 Traditional Communities: Strengths and Challenges

Strength: new members

We need to avoid oversimplification. It is wrong to assume that all longstanding religious communities are facing inevitable extinction. These communities are going through a transition stage. Patricia Wittberg states that we are *“undergoing a historical transition between the end of a religious life cycle and the start of another”*¹⁷. For several historical reasons,¹⁸ they have become very big, much too big! In terms of the number of communities on a given territory, in terms of the number of members which has grown exponentially in a few decades, especially at the beginning of the 20th Century, and finally in terms of the gigantic and omnipresent institutions in Québec up to the arrival of the Quiet Revolution.

With this in mind, I say that the normality of religious life is not in this pre-1960 historical past. It is an exceptional period which spans a little more than a century. The norm is rather the present, in 2009. In the long history of the Church, religious life was always the purview of a minority of believers. We return today to more normal proportions. From this point of view, there is nothing alarming in what is going on.

In this transitional context, new people are joining traditional communities. That is not the case of all communities. Some communities will disappear, at least in Canada, but often they will survive elsewhere in the world. While in other communities, there are young people, in their twenties and thirties, there are also mature adults, in their fifties, who decide to enter religious life. Some had been married or are even grandparents. It should also be noted that a number of international communities are calling upon their members from abroad. The latter come to Canada, not to study, but to live and work on the mission of the community. All these realities, even if they are often still fragile, seem to me to be carrying hope for the future.

Strength: broadened religious families

I spoke about a feature which relates to a large number of new communities: their inter-vocational nature. Traditional communities live, in their way, the inter-vocational reality.

In the last 10, 15 or 20 years, laypeople – single or married, and also clerics – requested to live a privileged bond with some religious communities. In the case of congregations, they are called “associates”. For these congregations, for the most part founded in the 19th and 20th centuries, this is a new occurrence. Associates are sustained by the spirituality of the communities, they contribute to their missions in various ways, and different forms of institutional links are being developed. In the communities founded in the Middle Ages (Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites), this type of bond goes back to the origins. They were called “lay brotherhoods”; they used to be called the third order. These lay brotherhoods form one of the branches of a single order. In the Order of the Preachers, for example, as of the 13th Century, Dominican sisters, brothers and then Dominican laity. Apostolic sisters appeared later. Together, we form the Dominican family. All that is a changing reality, which makes it possible for various communities to open up and become extended spiritual families.¹⁹

Challenge: institutional pruning and intergenerational balance

Although I say that several traditional communities have potential new members, nevertheless, at the demographic and institutional levels, these communities are facing crucial challenges. Younger members justifiably feel the burden of a heritage that they do not necessarily want. The institutional pruning the communities are currently going through is part and parcel of a promising future. We will travel lighter, so much the better! I also believe that some traditional communities will flourish again. That has already begun. Small hubs are forming. In faithfulness and recognition of past tradition, some groups are choosing to build a modest house beside the huge castle. It is a magnificent challenge, because it gives new life to the grace of the origins.

However, let me emphasize that such projects can be lived in evangelical authenticity only if they are carried out by an intergenerational groups. The problem of some new communities is having too many young members and not enough old ones able to testify to a fidelity to the Lord through the inevitable crises of life. Traditional communities, for their part, have the opposite problem: a minority of young people and a disproportionate number of older people. What emerges from these two cases is that the single-generation community is not ideal. On the contrary, balance and dialogue between generations seem to me to form one of the main challenges that the two networks, both traditional and new, have to take up.

3. OUR ENGAGEMENT IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

3.1 New Communities: Strengths and Challenges

Strength: an explicit and visible testimony

One fact stands out: several new communities have chosen an explicit and visible testimony. This is expressed in several ways. The most important one remains oral witness. Members of new communities usually do not hesitate to speak very openly and explicitly of their meeting with Christ, the path that led them to join a community, then of the joy of belonging. It is without doubt this type of witness that is the most authentic and challenging. To that another form of witness is added, which is about visibility or the sign value. Several new communities have chosen to wear a religious habit, either in traditional or newer style. Others carry a symbol, often a cross, which makes them visible and recognizable in public. Young people, in particular, seem to respond to the testimony expressed through these signs.

Strength: a mission centered on evangelization, faith education and spiritual experience

Among all the needs currently expressed today in the Church and the world, new communities are especially sensitive to the search for meaning and the spiritual quest, one of the great voids of our time. New communities certainly have diverse missions, but there is a dominant note: many communities focus their mission on evangelization, faith education and spiritual experience. From this standpoint, with the new ecclesial movements connected to the Church, new communities represent as a whole a spearhead for new evangelization in the Church.²⁰

However, new communities do not ignore other areas of apostolate, whether they be needs of a material, intellectual or physical nature. In this respect, the working methodology in these fields varies from one community to another. Some will advocate an implicit approach, recalling the parable of the leaven in the dough, while others will favour the image of the light not intended to remain under the bushel, as stated, for instance, in an excerpt from the statutes of one new community: *“All these activities, whether cultural, charitable or social, are made explicitly in the name of Jesus-Christ and are accompanied by the announcement of the Good News”*²¹. It should be noted, finally, that new communities have fewer institutional means than traditional communities to work in various social fields.

Strength: common apostolic projects

A few years ago, I gave a course on new communities at the Dominican Pastoral Institute where I teach. For this purpose, I organized an evening of witnessing. I asked three new communities to select one of their members to come and talk to my students. However, all the communities sent several people. After the evening, I decided to ask them why they had sent several delegates. And I remember their answer: *“You know, Rick, we know from experience that our witness is much stronger when there are many of us than when we come alone.”* While members of new communities can develop more personal apostolates, a great number of communities made the choice to have common apostolates (retreats, music, publishing houses, etc). This choice can be most stimulating at the community level and the combined witness of *being* and *doing* can indeed have a powerful pastoral impact, and is also a source of new vocations.

Challenge: to work in ecclesial and pastoral consultation and cooperation

On some occasions, new communities may have adopted a cavalier attitude towards existing pastoral practices in parishes or dioceses. They arrived without first taking the time to look at what was already being done. Without meaning any harm, they often sought to impose their way of evangelizing.²² In some cases tensions resulted between various groups and environments.

However, I hasten to add that there is currently a growing number of successful joint efforts: the Eucharistic Congress in Québec City in 2008, the *Montée Jeunesse* in 2009, various collaborations within the editing team of *En son nom. Vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, or what we are experiencing as a Committee of dialogue between traditional and new communities with the CRC. Where there has been dialogue, joint projects were realized. The challenge is the same for all: to work in a spirit of ecclesial pastoral consultation and cooperation.

3.2 Traditional Communities: Strengths and Challenges

Strength: charity that is interdependent and effective

When we think of the religious communities of Québec, Canada and elsewhere, we think mainly of their social involvement in the fields of education, health care and social services. Let us not forget, either, communities founded explicitly for the purpose of evangelization by the Word, faith education and spiritual research. At the social level, traditional communities are, in fact, highly committed groups: the women's rights, the environment, the fight against poverty, the integration of immigrants, and the list could go on. We find men and women religious of all ages in these areas of social divide. As such, they have always remained faithful to their original mission. They represent a charity that is interdependent and effective.

Challenge: to manifest the face of Christ in the midst of social commitment

I have just named four types of poverty that religious communities have historically answered: material, physical, intellectual and spiritual poverty. It should be said, firstly, that no community can meet all these needs at the same time. According to the charism of each, they will give priority to one or another of these needs. In addition, a full and balanced vision of evangelization insists on synergy between these four areas. Focusing on social commitment should not exclude concern for evangelization through the witness of life and the Word; conversely, evangelization by the ministry of the Word should not exclude concrete gestures that incarnate the Word of God.

I underlined the fact that new communities are, as a whole, very aware of the post-Christian context we live in. There is a reason why several communities insist on the need for explicit evangelization. It is a strength, which can also constitute an obstacle. This is the case when there are exclusive polarizations around certain fields of engagement and working methods. The danger, in some new communities, can be to focus exclusively on religious activities at the detriment of analysis and the commitment to social transformation. The risk is to create a Church that forms its own parallel society and closes in on itself, in a detached spiritualism, without social involvement.

But the same danger is just as prevalent within the network of traditional communities. For a long time, often from the beginning, they have been strongly committed in the areas of justice, peace, the environment, etc. And that is wonderful. The Gospel needs concrete action. However, how do these commitments contribute to the proclamation of the Gospel and to a deeper knowledge of the God of Jesus Christ? What difference do men and women religious make, according to their charism, in some mission fields where the work could be performed just as well by purely secular

organizations? I note, for my part, that there can exist an inverse focus to that which exists in some new communities: a secular commitment that does not bring about a clarification of the evangelical values that are at the heart of our life as men and women religious. Mother Teresa liked to remind her sisters: “*We are not first social workers; we are witnesses to Love*”. In other words, and I quote once again from the work of Franciscan Laurent Boisvert, “*the paramount vocation of a religious institute, even of working life, is not a work to be realized*”²³, it is an evangelical Face that incarnates and manifests.

I will stop here. If you recall, my two objectives were, on the one hand, to paint a picture of the strengths and challenges of each network, traditional and new communities. At the beginning of a dialogue, it is important to get acquainted with what the other party is going through. At the same time, I wanted to outline our differences, but also the areas of convergence between us. Please remember that the things we have in common far outweigh those that could put some distance between us.

To continue this reflection, I submit three questions to you:

1. In what I have just heard, what has touched me the most?
2. What are the questions that this has caused to emerge in me?
3. Which are the areas of convergence to which I am most sensitive?

Footnotes

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²The broad outlines of this conference were published in the form of article in Rick van Lier, “Église locale, communautés anciennes et communautés nouvelles, Jalons pour un dialogue fécond”, in *Lumen vitae*, vol. LXII, No. 4, 2007, pp. 391-403.

³See in particular our articles: “*Vocations et nouvelles communautés religieuses*”, in *Repartir du Christ. Congrès ACRCV - ACRF*. November 14, 15 and 16, 2005, Montreal, Vocational Center, 2005, pp. 29-47; “*Vitalité de la vie consacrée dans les nouvelles communautés religieuses*”, in *La vie des communautés religieuses*, November-December 2002, pp. 301-311; then, a series of eight articles on various new communities in the diocese of Montreal, published in the diocesan review of Montreal, *Vivre en Église*, from September 13, 2004 (No. 13) to May 2, 2005 (No. 9). For a broader look at the phenomenon, see: Frédéric Lenoir, *Les communautés nouvelles. Interviews des fondateurs*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, 365 p.; Pascal and Marie-Annick Pingault, *À la rencontre des communautés nouvelles. Petit guide*, Nouan le Fuzelier, Éd. des Béatitudes, 2005, 354 p.; Olivier Landron, *Les communautés nouvelles. Nouveaux visages du catholicisme français*, Paris, Cerf, Histoire, 2004, 478 p.

⁴By traditional communities, I mean religious institutes (Can. 573-730) founded before the Vatican II Council (1962-1965). In our mind, the term “traditional” has a strictly chronological value. New communities, for their part, are assemblies of the faithful (Can. 298-329) created, for the great majority of them, after the Vatican II Council. These communities reproduce in some cases the traditional model of religious institutes (e.g.: *Congrégation Saint-Jean, Fraternités monastiques de Jérusalem, Petits frères de la Croix*). Their innovation is primarily chronological. After the probationary steps provided by canon law, they will have a place among religious institutes. To properly distinguish between the various post-council communities, the latter can be

called “new communities”. Beside these new communities, there are communities of an innovative type which are typically called “novel communities”. Compared to the forms already recognized canonically in the Church, the latter innovate on two levels. First, they are “mixed”, i.e. made up of men and women belonging to the same community (e.g.: *Famille Myriam Beth'léhem*, *Famille Marie-Jeunesse*). Their members all are unmarried and make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, either by vow or promise. Some are ordained to a ministry. Then, there are communities that also welcome married couples and families (e.g.: *Communauté du Chemin Neuf*, *Communauté de l'Emmanuel*, *Communauté des Béatitudes*). These communities can be called “plurivocational”, according to the expression of Olivier Landron, in *Les communautés nouvelles. Nouveaux visages du catholicisme français*, Paris, Cerf, Histoire, 2004, p. 6. It should be noted that the expression “new community” though widespread, does not form an official canonical category. In this regard, we have unfortunately not yet found a distinct and satisfactory designation. In this conference, for the sake of convenience, I will use the expression “new community” for all these post-council communities without distinction.

⁵In a speech made in the United States in 2008, Cardinal Franc Rodé, prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, presented two types of hermeneutics concerned with the religious life revival since the Vatican II Council: the hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture, then the hermeneutics of continuity and reform. Cf. Cardinal Franc Rodé, “Reforming Religious Life with the Right Hermeneutics” - Conference at Stonehill College (U.S.A), 27 September 2008, 13 p. (http://www.stonehill.edu/Documents/MissionOffice/RLS_Documentation/RODE.pdf - consulted on June 9, 2009).

⁶Rick van Lier, o.p., interview with Pierre Vallée, reporter, “Les communautés religieuses nouvelles sont celles qui attirent le plus”, Special section on Religion, *Le Devoir*, Saturday, April 11, and Sunday, April 12, 2009, p. G8.

⁷Cf. Rick van Lier, “Church communities in the horizon of new evangelization”, in *Haute-Fidélité, revue diocésaine de Montréal*, vol. 126, No. 2, 2008, pp. 5-8; “The New Evangelization”, in *Haute-Fidélité, revue diocésaine de Montréal*, vol. 126, No. 2, 2008, pp. 31-34; “New evangelization”. New breath, new practices”, conference published on the Dominican Pastoral Institute's web site: <http://www.ipastorale.ca/bibliovirtuelle/fv-08.htm>. Also: Jean Rigal, “New Evangelization. Understanding this new approach. The questions it raises”, in *New Theological Review*, No. 127, 2005, pp. 436-437.

⁸On the relationship between local Churches and new communities, see in particular: *Criteria of evaluation for the new movements connected with the Church and associations*, written by the Commission of theology of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), June 2002, and published on the CCCB's website: www.cccb.ca. For a broader point of view, that of the Catholic Church as a whole, it will be useful to reread the text of Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte's speech at the Bishops' Synod on Consecrated Life: “New communities”, *Osservatore Romano*, No. 45 (2340), November 8, 1994, p. 54. In a spirit of understanding connected with the Church, this text emphasizes the contribution of new communities to Church life. In addition to these remarks, eight suggestions are proposed to help new communities grow in harmony. Lastly, the document ends with a wish: “We wish that the Synod ask traditional communities to be attentive to incipient groups, to give them their support, their wisdom, to let themselves be questioned by these groups, and that new groups cultivate an attitude of openness vis-à-vis traditional communities. Lastly, we wish that any new community who approaches the pastor of a Church to obtain a certain recognition connected with the Church be at once invited to set up a structure of dialogue with members of communities who have acquired a wealth of experience.”

⁹American sociologist Patricia Wittberg notes the same tendency within the new communities in the United States. See her excellent presentation: “Religious Apostolates, Past and Future: Lessons from the Present Refounding Cycle”, National Association for Treasurers of Religious Institutes (NATRI), 2007, Miami, posted on the NATRI website, <http://www.natri.org/programs/2007Handouts/PatriciaWittbergKeynote.pdf>; the French translation of this text was published under the title “Apostolat religieux, passé et futur : les leçons du présent cycle de refondation (partie 1)”, in *En son nom. Vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, vol. 76, No. 3, 2009, pp. 176-190; the second part of the article will be published in the next issue of the review.

¹⁰We find this invitation of the council, in particular in *Perfectae caritatis*, number 2: “The restoration and adaptation of religious life include at the same time a constant return to the sources of all Christian life, as well as the original inspiration of the institutes, and, in addition, the adaptation of the latter to new conditions of existence. [...] This is why one highlights and faithfully retains the spirit of the founders and their specific

intentions [...]”. On the relationships of religious communities with their founding figures in association with the theology of charisms, see Rick van Lier, *Comme des arbres qui marchent. Vie consacrée et charismes des fondateurs*, Ottawa, Novalis, 2007, 167 p.

¹¹There are in fact some exceptions: communities of a new type founded before the Council, in particular: Foyers de Charité (1936), Madonna House Apostolate (1947), Société du Christ-Seigneur (1951).

¹²Olivier Landron talks of “plurivocational” communities (*Les communautés nouvelles. Nouveaux visages du catholicisme français*, Paris, Cerf, Histoire, 2004, p. 6); Alphonse Borrás calls them “ecclesial condensations” (“Le droit canonique et la vitalité des communautés nouvelles”, in *Nouvelle Revue théologique*, No. 118, 1996, pp. 208 and 209); and Maria Casey uses the expression “ecclesial microcosms” (*Breaking from the Bud. New Forms of Consecrated Life*, Wurwood (Australia), Sisters of St. Joseph NSW, 2001, p. 189).

¹³On the Vatican II Council and new communities, I would like to mention the study by Dominique LeRouzès, *Vatican II et les communautés nouvelles. Réception de AD gentes dans les statuts et le Livre de Vie de la Famille Marie Jeunesse*, Master's thesis, Faculty of theology and religious sciences, Laval University, Québec City, 2003, 254 p.; see also the contributions of Laurent Villemin, Philippe Gonzales and Paul Philibert, as well as Lorraine Caza in the collective *Communautés nouvelles, nouvelles communautés, in Lumen vitae*, vol. LXII, No. 4, 2007, pp. 362-475.

¹⁴Laurent Fabre, “Communautés anciennes et communautés nouvelles”, *Vie consacrée*, No. 1-2, 1998, p. 34.

¹⁵Michel Dortel-Claudot, *Communautés nouvelles et liberté d'association dans l'Église*, cours donné aux Facultés jésuites de Paris (Centre Sèvres) en janvier 2005, Lyon, Communauté du Chemin Neuf, 2006, p. 51.

¹⁶Cf. Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, “Les communautés nouvelles”, *Osservatore romano*, No. 45 (2340), November 8, 1994, p. 54.

¹⁷“Apostolat religieux, passé et futur : les leçons du présent cycle de refondation (partie 1)” in *En son nom. Vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, vol. 76, No. 3, 2009, p. 185.

¹⁸For the analysis of these reasons, see our article published in two parts: “Quatre siècles de vie religieuse au Québec. Panorama historique (Partie A)”, in *En son nom. Vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, vol. 66, No. 5. November-December 2008, pp. 298-315. “Quatre siècles de vie religieuse au Québec. Panorama historique (Partie B)”, in *En son nom. Vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, vol. 67, No. 1, January-February 2009, pp. 46-60.

¹⁹On this reality, see the exhaustive study by Bernadette Delizy, *Vers des “Familles évangéliques”. Le renouveau des relations entre chrétiens et congrégations*, Paris/Montréal, Éditions de l'Atelier – Éditions Ouvrières/Novalis, 2004, 585 p., as well as the collective *Laiques et personnes consacrées. Quel arrimage? Actes du Colloque 2004*, in *Cahiers de spiritualité ignatienne*, No. 113, May-August 2005, 154 p.

²⁰See in particular the collective *Don de l'Esprit. Espérance pour les hommes*, Rome, May 30, 1998: Rencontre du Saint-Père avec les Mouvements ecclésiaux et les Communautés nouvelles, Nouan-le-Fuzelier, Éd. des Béatitudes, 228 p.

²¹Quoted by Michel Dortel-Claudot, *Communautés nouvelles et liberté d'association dans l'Église*, course given to the Facultés jésuites de Paris (Sèvres Center) in January 2005, Lyon, Communauté du Chemin Neuf, 2006, p. 59.

²²On this question, see in particular: Jean Rigal, “La nouvelle évangélisation. Comprendre cette nouvelle approche. Les questions qu'elle suscite”, in *Nouvelle revue théologique*, No. 127, 2005, pp. 451-452; Robert Pléty, *Église ordinaire et communautés nouvelles. Un problème de communication*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, “Pascal Thomas – Pratiques chrétiennes”, No. 5, 1994, 184 p.; Laurent Villemin, “La paroisse, le diocèse et les nouveaux mouvements”, in *Études*, volume 405/6, December 2006, pp. 635-646.

²³Laurent Boisvert, *Le charisme. Un visage évangélique à incarner et à manifester*, Montréal, Bellarmin, 2004, p. 26.