

CRC MISSION

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. The mission of the CRC is to encourage its members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. The CRC supports its members in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for audacious ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.

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Quotes from Pope Francis on Consecrated Life

An "Exodus" from Yourselfes

It is Christ who called you to follow him in the consecrated life and this means continuously making an "exodus" from yourselves in order to *centre your life on Christ and on his Gospel*, on the will of God, laying aside your own plans, in order to say with St Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).¹

The Exercise of Authority

May you always know how to exercise authority by accompanying, understanding, helping and loving; by embracing every man and every woman, especially people who feel alone, excluded, barren, on the existential margins of the human heart. Let us keep our gaze fixed on the Cross: there is found any authority in the Church, where the One who is the Lord becomes a servant to the point of the total gift of himself.²

Poverty...

Poverty as overcoming every kind of selfishness, in the logic of the Gospel which teaches us to trust in God's Providence. Poverty as a sign for the entire Church that it is not we who build the Kingdom of God. It is not human means that make it grow, but it is primarily the power and the grace of the Lord, working through our weakness. "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,*" the Apostle to the Gentiles tells us (2 Cor 12:9).

Poverty teaches solidarity, sharing and charity, and is also expressed in moderation and joy in the essential, to put us on guard against material idols that obscure the real meaning of life. A poverty learned with the humble, the poor, the sick and all those who are on the existential outskirts of life. A theoretical poverty is no use to us. Poverty is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, in the poor, in the sick and in children.³

¹ Address to the Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General. Rome, May 8, 2013.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

The Apostolic Exhortation “THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL”

Introduction to the Bulletin’s Articles

“*Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis, to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful...*” So begins the Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. We, consecrated persons, we are included there among the addressees of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) “on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world!”

We are there, but there is no chapter or even a paragraph that speaks about the specific service that would be ours in the Church’s “new chapter of evangelization” (EG 1).

Call to Conversion

So it is clear: we are not called upon to be besides or—even less—above the baptized: we will be “with” them. We are summoned to embark with all the baptized on a path of “pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (EG 25).

It is up to us to let ourselves be challenged! And that is the goal of this bulletin entrusted to the CRC Theological Commission.

You will discover here a strong call to conversion relayed by Timothy Scott, CSB, summoning us to a renewed relationship with others and with the world. With Lorraine Caza, CND, you will see how *The Joy of the Gospel* can provide valuable tools for building and rebuilding our communities. In the same perspective, Carmelle Bisson, AMJ, shows us how to translate in our communities

“the personal accompaniment in processes of growth” that Pope Francis asks of us: That is the challenge of a culture of ongoing, lifelong learning.

But *The Joy of the Gospel* also brings us a renewal of the mission. Here, Margaret Patricia Brady, OSB, brings us back to the heart of our mission: to become the revealers and mediators of Christ. Which path should be taken for this essential thing? Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS, answers: “the encounter,” and invites us to “let ourselves be moved in our conception of Evangelization.”

And our own charisms? It’s time to “revisit and revitalize them” says Lorraine d’Entremont, SC; in doing so, we will bring along all the baptized into a renewed welcome of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Invitation to Get Under Way

There isn’t the slightest doubt: religious life has a valuable contribution to make to the “the Church’s missionary transformation.” An example of this is given in the final article in this bulletin on monastic life. But it is all of our communities that are called upon to “go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ” (EG 49). We are all called upon to become what we are: “missionary disciples.” Are you ready to get back on the road?

Antoine Emmanuel, FMJ

Francis Speaks Firmly and Directly to Vowed Religious



Introduction

In doing a simple word search of the term “consecrated” in *Evangelii Gaudium*, I was struck by the negative tone found in more than one reference to vowed religious. By way of example, consider the following:

Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity... (EG 78)

One needs to examine the context for this and similar comments (for example, EG 100 and 107). About one-third of the exhortation is spent on a kind of informal “diagnosis” (EG 108) outlining the

symptoms of an ailment that prevents the Church from being true to its mission.

The Problems Faced by Religious Life Today

The very stability of religious orders with their on-going commitment to a particular apostolate constitutes at the same time their great value to the Church and the threat they pose that Pope Francis so clearly lays out. The “success” of a Catholic college or health care facility carries with it a risk of institutional stasis and a lessening of evangelical fervor. Simply put, how does a well-attended and well-funded Catholic institution evangelize? Or, is it drifting “...into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk.” (EG 207)

Turning from the institutional to the personal, Francis castigates those of us who have become comfortable in the stability afforded by our communities. One's free time becomes paramount in a tepid and privatized spirituality that puts a premium on a narrowly-defined orthodoxy:

A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. (EG 94)

The malaise is not doctrinal but rather pastoral and is marked by a deadening inner orientation that Francis terms "spiritual worldliness." Whether in the form of a "practical Gnosticism" or a "promethean neo-Pelagianism," its effects are troubling. His conclusion is succinct and devastating: "In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others." (EG 94)

Amid such joylessness, how do religious and indeed the Church as a whole (re)discover the joy of the Gospel?

Church and Sacrament

A preliminary question is necessarily ecclesiological: What does it mean to be Church? For Francis, one cannot separate the Church's nature from its activity: "By her very nature, the Church is missionary." (EG 179) I would term it a *sacramentality in action*. The ecclesial reform that Francis envisions leads one to surmise that for him, religious life is as much about "doing" as "being." It would seem that we are coming to the end of a problematic comparison of "states of life." The eschatological witness of religious life is now subordinated to its participation in the missionary dynamic of the Church. We are called to be Spirit-filled evangelizers who both pray and work. (EG 262)

Having completed his diagnosis, he proposes a treatment in order that the Church may regain her spiritual health. Among many different approaches laid out in *Evangelii Gaudium*, I would suggest that there are two by which in virtue of their special consecration, vowed religious can share in the identity of "missionary disciples." (EG 120)

I. A Renewed Relationship with Others

Evangelization, or as Francis terms it, "sharing the joy of the Gospel" needs to be preceded by a ministry of presence. Being with others in the many challenges they experience introduces yet another form of sacramentality:

The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (Ex 3:5). (EG 169)

In this quiet presence, those whom we first must accompany are the economically marginalized. "We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor." (EG 48) Our solidarity with them includes an embrace of popular piety that constitutes a *locus theologicus* of primary importance. "Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor." (EG 124)

Fundamentally, our work of evangelization with the poor entails an inversion of roles, for as Francis states: "We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them." (EG 198) Lest we romanticize this approach, *Evangelii Gaudium* reminds us that the option for the poor is a theological rather than a sociological category. Not only were the poor the first recipients of the Good News, today they present to us the face of the suffering Christ.

II. A Renewed Relationship with the World

This new theological orientation provides a lens through which we can examine the world as defined by culture, geography and economy. In our relationship with the poor, we are moved to acknowledge the priority of the social function of property over its ownership and use by individuals. (cf. EG 189) This most controversial section of the exhortation leads Francis to suggest all kinds of practical consequences:

This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use. (EG 192)

Conclusion

Viewed in light of these renewed relationships, evangelization takes on a very different character. While most religious in the Church are women, Francis' invitation to discover "...a Marian 'style' to the Church's work of evangelization" (EG 288) may be particularly apt for both men and women religious.

Perhaps missing in *Evangeli Gaudium* is the notion how vowed religious have a particular way of sharing in the mission of evangelization. We need to go back to *Perfectae caritatis* to recall how consecrated men and women witness to an explicit ecclesial relationship, making their ministry "... a holy service and a work characteristic of love, entrusted to them by the Church to be carried out in its name." (*Perfectae caritatis* 8)

Bearing in mind Francis' caution about theologians about being content with a "desk-bound theology" (vv. 133), let me conclude with his exhortation that all evangelizers may find in the sufferings of others the very wounds of the Saviour.

"Sometimes we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people." (EG 270)

In such a powerful human encounter, wonderfully complicated and wonderfully fulfilling, as one religious speaking to his brothers and sisters in the consecrated life, Francis invites us to encounter God.

Questions:

1. In faithfulness to Christ, how is the Spirit calling my community in its congregational commitments to particular ministries?
2. How are we discovering the *art of accompaniment*?
3. How do we experience a "Marian style" to evangelization?

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4 BASIC PRINCIPLES

*Proposed by Our Brother Francis for Building
a Community Where Peace Can Flourish*



In the wonderful Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of Pope Francis, which followed the Synod on the New Evangelization, Chapter four is devoted to the social dimension of evangelization.¹ Our father and brother Francis warns us at the very beginning of this significant development, that he does not intend to offer us a synthesis of the Church's entire social doctrine, but that he does want to help us reflect on two points: the inclusion of the poor in society,² and peace and social dialogue.³

But can we really achieve this peace if we do not commit all our energies into building the human communities to which we belong: families, communities of consecrated life, civil society, Church? To succeed in this construction, Pope Francis invites us to apply four basic principles:

Time is greater than space.⁴
Unity prevails over conflict.⁵
Realities are more important than ideas.⁶
The whole is greater than the part.⁷

¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 176-258.

² *Ibid.*, 186-216.

³ *Ibid.*, 217-258.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 222-225.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 226-230.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 231-233.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 234-237.

A first reading of these statements might leave us somewhat puzzled, even surprised. But whoever takes the trouble to delve more deeply into these principles could find them to be of great help in attaining a community life bearer of peace.

1. To make progress in building a people, always remember, says Francis, that **time is greater than space.**

After a moment of surprise, I read and reread Numbers 222 through 225 several times. They deal with the tension between fullness and limitation, between time and the individual moment. Broadly speaking, time “has to do with fullness” while each individual moment “has to do with limitation.” Our life occurs, “poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself.”

If you give priority to time over space, Francis tells us, that enables you “to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results,” it helps you “patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans.” Basically, our Brother Francis is comparing “spaces and power” and “time and processes.”

Giving priority to space, from this perspective, “means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion.” Giving priority to time “means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces.” Francis asks the question: “I wonder if there are people in today’s world who are really concerned about generating processes of people-building?” Evangelism is a work of patience. In light of John 16:12 and Mt 13:24-30, are we not asked to “pay attention to the bigger picture,” to have “concern for the long run.”

2. The great principle: “**Unity prevails over conflict**” is also a founding principle for building a community.

How can one look at a conflict? Francis mentions three possible answers: People can simply look at the conflict and go their way as if nothing happened. People can embrace the conflict in such a way that they become its prisoners, “lose their bearings” and then “unity is impossible.” The third solution, the one advocated by Francis, is to have “the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process.” Adopting the third way towards the conflict will enable us “to build communion amid disagreement.” Are we able to see others in their deepest dignity? By developing solidarity in its deepest and most challenging sense with our brothers and sisters, we become aware that this solidarity is “a way of making history,” that it points us toward “a diversified and life-giving unity.”

Francis says that the sign of this unity and reconciliation of all things in Christ is peace and he refers to Eph 2:14 and Col 1:20. For Francis, the first area of this reconciliation of differences is “within ourselves, our own lives, ever threatened as they are by fragmentation and breakdown.” Remember, says Francis, “Christ has made all things one in himself,” that “unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity.” You must work ceaselessly to bring forth a “reconciled diversity.”

3. A third principle must be implemented if we are to build the community: Never forget that **“realities are more important than ideas.”**

Francis advises us that “there has to be continuous dialogue between the two” (reality and ideas). We should reject the “various means of masking reality.” I like the image used by Francis: cosmetics can’t take the place of real care for our bodies; don’t reduce policy or faith to rhetoric. And if we look in the Gospel for a basis for this priority given to reality over ideas, don’t we come back to the Incarnation? A “word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew,” that is what is “essential to evangelization.”

Giving priority to reality, Francis says, “helps us to see that the Church’s history is a history of salvation;” “to be mindful of those saints who inculturated the Gospel in the lives of our peoples;” “to reap the fruits of the Church’s rich bi-millennial tradition;” “put the word into practice;” “perform works of justice and charity.” Whoever does not make the word reality builds on sand, remains “in the realm of pure ideas and ends up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centredness and gnosticism.”

4. Anyone who wants to build a community must honour a fourth principle, namely that **“the whole is greater than the part.”**

You have to “pay attention to the global” dimension, but at the same time, “we need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground.” Two extremes are to be avoided: 1) people “get caught up in an abstract, globalized universe,” and 2) “they turn into a museum of local folklore, a world apart, doomed to doing the same things over and over, and incapable of being challenged by novelty or appreciating the beauty which God bestows beyond their borders.”

“There is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions.” We constantly have to broaden our horizons, but must do so “without evasion or uprooting.” We can work “on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective.” People who are well-rooted and comfortable with their identity “who wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community” do not need to lose their individualism or hide their identity; on the contrary, says Pope Francis, “they receive new impulses to personal growth.”

In Christian terms, this fourth principle evokes “the totality or integrity of the Gospel.” There is room in it for academics as well as for workers, for heads of corporations as well as for artists; it is open to one and all. Francis reiterates, once again, that the “genius of each people receives in its own way the entire Gospel and embodies it in expressions of prayer, fraternity, justice, struggle and celebration.” Inherent in the Gospel is this criterion of totality: The Gospel must be proclaimed to all people, “until it has healed and strengthened every aspect of humanity, until it has brought all men and women together at table in God’s Kingdom.”

Some Questions for Us:

1. How do my choices, my decisions express that I give priority to time? Or that I prioritize space?
2. How do we deal with conflicts in the community to which I belong?
3. Are our community discernments rooted in our experiences or in our theories?
4. In the Institute to which I belong, how do we encourage the development of a broader perspective in work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood?

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For a Culture of Ongoing Formation

“Until Christ is formed in us” (Gal 4:19)

Pope Francis, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, deals with the proclamation of the Gospel.¹ This proclamation of the Good News of Salvation is open to all regardless of race, language, people, nation and, therefore, to diverse cultures. However, “the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural” (EG 117). This message will only take flesh gradually in the life of any person called to achieve “the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

This long process of growth and appropriation of the message is challenging and demanding. Pope Francis opens up a gap in the midst of these requirements and stresses the importance of “personal accompaniment in processes of growth” (EG 169-173), hence the “need for ‘a pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery’.”² It is with this approach that we will deepen the concept of the culture of permanent, ongoing formation in consecrated life, a universal notion and one easily transferable from one cultural context to another.

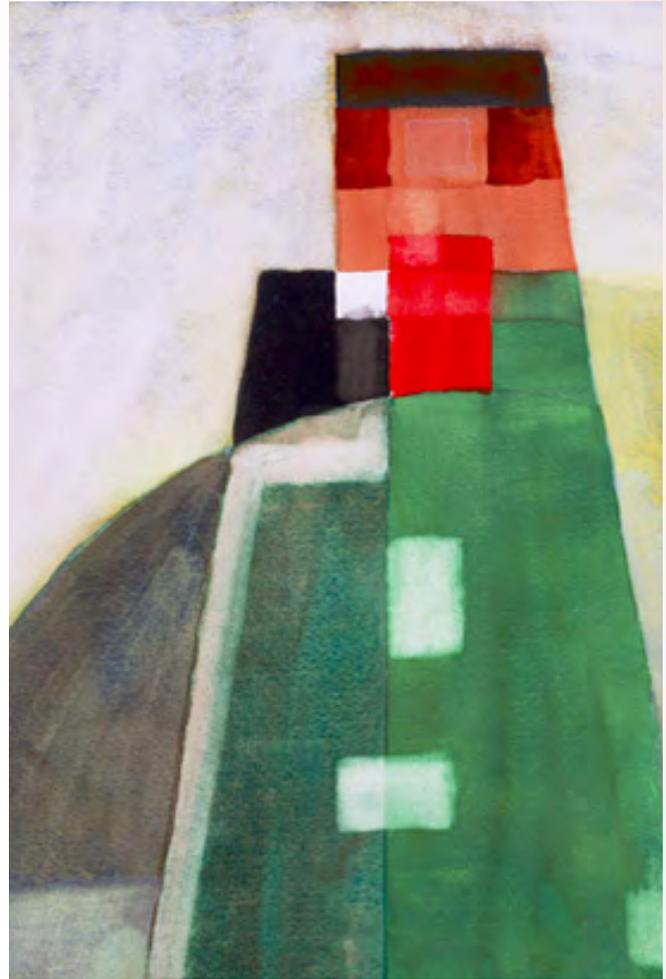
A Refined Approach

Appropriating the concept of a culture of ongoing formation leads to a refinement of meaning. On the one hand, we can consider culture in its general sense (a person keen for knowledge), approach it from the angle of an interest in one particular area (pastoral theological culture), from which a skill or competence might emerge (homiletic culture). These details appeal rather to the interest of an individual.

¹ Pope Francis. The Proclamation of the Gospel in *The Joy of the Gospel*. Apostolic Exhortation. Montreal: Novalis. 2013. Chapter 3, 110–175. Henceforth in the article, we will use the abbreviation EG to refer to this exhortation.

² *Ibid.*, 171.

³ A. Cencini. *La formation permanente... Y croyons-nous vraiment?* Bruxelles: Lessius, 2014, p. 16.



On the other hand, we can also talk about the “culture of ‘something’ that one wishes to promote by getting everyone involved in the action. In this case, it is not just a generic cognitive fact or an interest or a skill, but a personal commitment to building something in which one believes and which increasingly becomes a common heritage.”³ The culture of ongoing formation responds to this orientation.

A New Perspective

The terms “doing one’s seminary” or “doing one’s novitiate,” or one’s “post-novitiate” bring out the concept of an initial formation framed in a period of time. But building upon a culture of ongoing formation or lifelong learning means going beyond the notion of a definite time and entering into a permanent attitude of letting oneself be formed.

This basic attitude or permanent state of formation is the result of a daily response to an unceasing call reiterated at the birth of a new being according to the Spirit. Formation, considered in this way, is no longer presented as a time for training, followed by a time to put into practice the results of the newly acquired learning. Certainly, an intensive time of basic formation is required, but it must be oriented above all else towards a deeper call that allows oneself to be shaped by life, in an incessant inner availability to the calls of the Spirit.

That is a continuous route that, in fidelity to the first call, leads the person to interiority, for that is where the calls for permanent transformation are heard. At the bottom of this crucible, while everything is being received in its pure truth, the otherness (alterity) can then live in total freedom, for genuine formation is called to clear up, to free this space of communion and dialogue between God, others and oneself.

A Mentality to Be Converted

Talking about the culture of ongoing formation requires a change in mindset. It involves moving from an approach of updates (*aggiornamento*) through sessions, retreats or activities of that kind, to a daily reading of experiences and, by extension, understanding that this renewed vision cannot be limited to activities proposed by a permanent formation team, no matter how competent they may be. In both cases, the risk is great to remain mired in concepts and content that are not integrated, to not delve more deeply into personal and community growth.

This change of mindset or mentality in the individual creates a permanent inner willingness, an openness, to allow oneself to be taught. This is *docibilitas*.⁴ This *docibilitas* can sometimes be confused with docility (*docilitas*). While docility appears as acquiescence to the will of another, *docibilitas* is in fact letting oneself be freely affected by both life and other people. It also points to the Son receiving Himself from the Father and offering His life as a gift to others. Thus, *docibilitas* leads the individual to focus more on conforming his or her life to the sentiments of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5) rather than complying with external acts. This inner attitude predis-

poses the individual to revisit his or her life while discovering within in it all of the formation resources that daily life reveals.

Life: A Permanent Place for Theology

God now says: “Today Salvation has come to this house” (Lk 19:9). Formation is grafted onto life and life brings formative invitations: “A purification of motivations, an increasingly strong and consistent loyalty to life’s major choices, a realistic awareness of the need to be helped by others, joined with an effective freedom to ask for this aid.”⁵ The person truly in ongoing formation has the firm conviction that life is a permanent place in which God is present and forms the heart of his people.

In Conclusion

A culture of permanent formation does not exclude formation time or shorter or longer experiences such as thirty-day retreats, or sabbatical years. These times will be even more formative if the individuals are aware that they are not starting at zero, but that they are continuing this uninterrupted relationship of love between Master and disciple. Let us be among those women and men who have the passion to “appropriate the mystery” by delving deeper and deeper into God’s pedagogy of accompaniment towards his people, and let us dare to risk the culture of permanent, ongoing formation⁶ “until Christ is formed in us” (Gal 4:19).

Questions:

1. How do the comments in this article challenge me?
2. Imitate Christ,” “follow Christ” and “let me be shaped according to the feelings of the Son:” What are the resonances of these expressions in me?

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⁴ A. Cencini. *La formation permanente... Y croyons-nous vraiment?* Bruxelles: Lessius, 2014, p. 48–49. The word *docibilitas* has no equivalent in English.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81–112. By providing concrete leads, this chapter enables one to clarify what might seem obscure in the call for a culture of ongoing formation.

Becoming Living Manifestations of God



Introduction

One of the underlying themes of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, is revelation. “To speak from the heart means that our hearts must not just be on fire, but also enlightened by the fullness of revelation...” (EG 144) Again Pope Francis says, “Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the Good News not only with words but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence” (EG 259).

The Unevangelized or Pre-Evangelized

Beginning with the unevangelized or pre-evangelized, natural revelation is already present in the universe. It is possible to know God with certainty from created things by the light of human reason. (DV 3; Denzinger, 1785) In this post-modern secularized era in which we live, there is an urgency that God’s Word be proclaimed so that it may be brought to conscious and reflective awareness. This is the meaning of revelation for the Church and its mission.

Role of Religious in the Church's Mission

How specifically do religious fit into this schema? Vatican II clearly stated:

Religious should carefully consider that through them, to believers and non-believers alike, the Church truly wishes to give an increasingly clearer revelation of Christ. Through them Christ should be shown contemplating on the mountain, announcing God's kingdom to the multitude, healing the sick and the maimed, turning sinners to wholesome fruit, blessing children, doing good to all, and always obeying the will of the Father.... (LG 46)

Challenged to be revealers and mediators of Christ, religious act as a bridge between believers and non-believers sharing the joy of the Gospel with all whom they encounter, if not explicitly in word, certainly in action and life-style.

Baptized into trinitarian life, religious as members of the Church, missionary disciples of Christ, are charged with the task of evangelization. They are called to be dynamically involved in faithfully receiving or mediating the revelatory Word of God both for themselves and for others. As pilgrims on their way to God, they are continually engaged in on-going conversion while offering the Word of Life, the Gospel of Christ to peoples of different cultures.

For it is imperative to evangelize cultures so as to inculturate the Gospel because God's grace becomes flesh in the cultures of those who receive it. God speaks the Divine Word through the human community in communion with all of creation. Through the incarnation of the Son of God, the possibilities of human nature

were revealed. The more fully a human being is transformed by God, the more luminous he or she becomes and the more deeply God is incarnated. Thus the Word becomes flesh in the one who receives it.

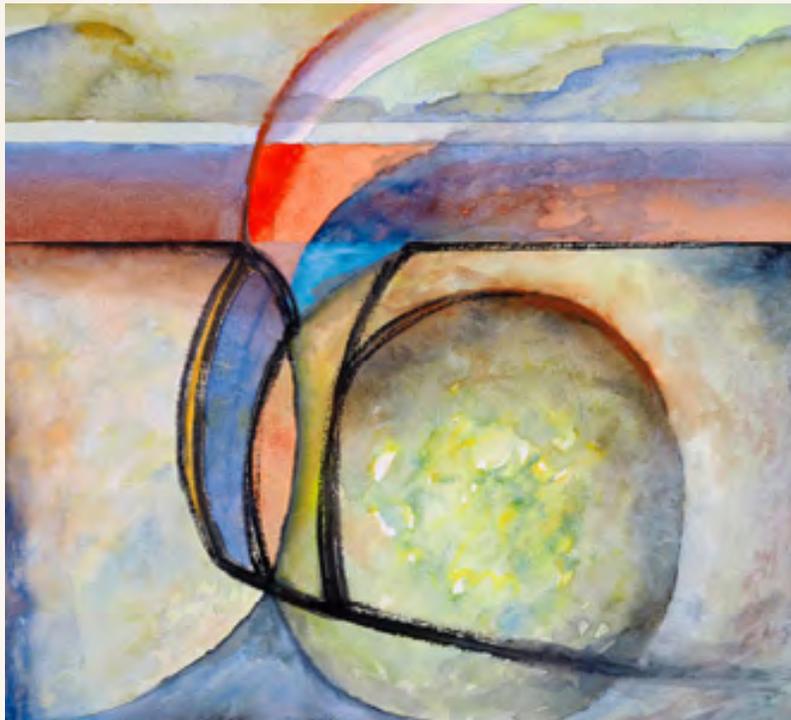
In this way we advance toward God, as God's kingdom comes among us, making us one and holy in the mystery of the Trinity. This is an exhortation which encourages men and women religious to become missionaries in the joy of the Risen Christ. Accepting the great challenges of our time and struggling against injustices while being continually nourished by the Word of God, liturgy and prayer, religious act as true witnesses to the Presence of God to those around them, to those they live and work with and to those they serve. Becoming living revelations of God in the midst of everyday life, women and men religious mirror the incarnated Word of God to a world hungering for a taste of the divine.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you hear God's Word proclaimed, do you reflect on how it touches your own life calling you to greater transformation into Christ?
2. What might you do to reveal and mediate Christ to your community, the people you work for or with each day?
3. Does the joy of your life impact the way you evangelize those around you?

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The ENCOUNTER *at the Heart of Evangelization*



Evangelization is always new because it is the encounter of God the creator and saviour in Jesus Christ within the Spirit. Encounter of God with human beings, encounter of individuals with God, who is revealed to them in the Word and in the encounter of sisters and brothers in humanity.

In his Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,¹ Pope Francis introduces us to a dynamic of encounter that is destined to determine our being as “missionary disciples” and our mission of evangelization to the heart of God’s People. This encounter-dynamic movement is shaping the pilgrimage of humanity as well as that of community life. What about the encounter movement? How far does it go? What does it mean in the life of our communities?

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome, November 24, 2013.

² The numbers in *Evangelii Gaudium* which speak of encounter: EG 1, 3–5, 7, 8, 13, 19–21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 42, 46, 49, 87, 91, 97, 111, 113, 120, 132, 153, 166–167, 174, 179, 180–181, 264, 272, 288.

What about this Encounter Movement?

The encounter² falls within a double movement of “going out from oneself”—going to the encounter and letting oneself be encountered—with the aim of entering into a relationship. The encounter, in both of its dimensions, gives rise to a longing, an expectation. It contains an unknown and gives rise to an act of faith. It awakens feelings, implies a motivation, starts and requires learning how to meet, to talk, to dialogue, to listen and to discover (EG 141,142, 279).

Going out to others means taking the initiative, leaving one’s world, setting out, approaching others, entering into communication. *To let oneself be encountered* requires letting oneself be approached, opening a door, making room for the others, welcoming, listening and talking to them.

The encounter is revealed as an issue of freedom and growth in which the history of the person and the community is shaped. Viewed as a place of dialogue, brotherhood, support, commitment, communion and unity, the encounter is the challenge of a life turned towards others, transformed in love and giving, of a missionary life filled with joy.

This movement takes us into the heart of God’s plan. Before an individual or a people started going towards God, it pleased God to take the first steps, to let himself be known, to enter into dialogue with human beings (Ex 3:4-5,12; Is 43:1-5) and to share trinitarian love with him. He, who chose us before the founding of the world, is revealed to us through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Spirit (Eph 1:3-10). From this founding encounter emerges the desire to let oneself be encountered and to go towards God and towards our sisters and brothers.

The encounter is an experience of calling and sending forth (EG 19-20). The Scriptures reveal to us how the encounter of God with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Moses (Ex 3:17), Jeremiah (Jer 1:7), the disciples of Jesus (Mt 28:19-20) led them to allow

themselves to be encountered, to go out from themselves, to answer the call and take up the assignments entrusted to them. The Church, born for the mission, proclaims the salvation that God has wrought (EG 113) in the world. Its members are called to the same vocation to holiness (LG 11, 32, 40) and missionary disciples through baptism (EG 120) are sent out and must help one another in the mission (LG 32).

This existential experience of the encounter at the heart of the mission attests that *the person is a mission* (EG 273). We exist by and for the encounter, and we cannot uproot this dimension from our being. We are like branded with the mission to go to the encounter, to bring light, to bless, to enliven, to raise up and to free (EG 273).

How Far Does the Encounter Go?

To let oneself be encountered by God is the experience of a lifetime. An experience of the merciful tenderness of the Father (EG 279-280), of going out from ourselves and going forth on a mission. An experience of the gaze and call of Jesus that challenges our world (Mk 2:13-14; 10:21-24) and fuels our desire to seek him, to love him and proclaim him. (EG 178) “With Christ joy is constantly born anew.” (EG 1)

Discovering the primacy of the love of God (Is 44:2, 24; 49:1; Jer 1:5) opens to conversion. The resulting inner upheaval compels proclamation of that love which fills us up. It frees us, makes us close to the impoverished and the excluded. It leads us to recognize their dignity beyond appearances, place and culture, and leads us in search of paths of brotherhood and communion. It guides us in the path that Jesus traced out for us: a path that is sometimes uncomfortable. Jesus went towards the marginalized, served them, restored their dignity, and was judged for such action. He challenged authority and acted against customs. He experienced the encounter all the way to the summit of the cross in the total gift to the will of his Father.

What Does This Encounter Movement Mean in the Life of Our Communities?

The encounter creates and builds community. It reveals an experience of human, spiritual, community and apostolic growth. It proves to be a place of conversion in the love of Christ and of sisters and brothers, and it blossoms through learning about our capacities for welcome, listening, sharing and support.

The community lets itself be evangelized so it can evangelize. The members feel that the Lord precedes them in love (Jn 4:10). They recognize their weaknesses, they try not to retreat nor let themselves get mired in mediocrity (EG 121). The Good News received and shared encourages trust in the encounter of others at the heart of daily life.

The missionary disciple is strengthened in this movement of decentring and discernment. The mission is deepened, and the community and apostolic activities are imbued with this purification process. Always on a mission to evangelize, members advance to the crossroads to invite the marginalized and the poor people. They allow their conceptions and approaches to be shifted to risk an *otherness* of the mission in collaboration with the laity, other institutes and other organisations. They take the time to move forward together in God's time and space, and to work for the long term.³

Another challenge is interculturality. The cultural-diversity encounter, recognized as a gift, leads to the building of unity in "multifaceted harmony" (EG 117). Developing within a dynamic of conversion, the intercultural encounter presupposes more than just good will. It requires dialogue, reciprocity, compromise and a clear and shared vision.⁴ It requires the commitment of everyone in overcoming complacency, competition and

assimilation to switch to a radical welcome of the different cultures and achieve true mutual relationship. A relationship in which we ensure that the presence, gifts and perspectives of each can influence the identity, ministries and structures of the community.⁵

Conclusion

At the end of this reflection, we may say that the encounter is an essential dimension of evangelization. It implies a relationship between God and the individual, a relationship that transforms and makes one go out from oneself to go towards the other. Letting oneself be encountered and encountering God as well as sisters and brothers is learned along the way. The missionary disciple, strengthened by the Spirit, carries the love of Jesus to others in the humble attitude of one who is willing to learn (EG 128).

In community, evangelization begins by building a living fraternal relationship, called to carry out the institute's mission. Pope Francis exhorts us "*Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love!*" (EG 101) because the community, place of evangelization, is essentially missionary and life-giving. Finally, the shared mission with others as well as the intercultural encounter in international communities bear witness to the evangelizing mission to which we are called today.

Questions:

1. What about our fraternal encounter in community?
2. What about our encounter with the impoverished people and those on the margins of our society?

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³ Anne Fortin. "Pourquoi évangéliser," *Cahiers de spiritualité ignatienne*, "La nouvelle évangélisation. Pour qui? Pour quoi?", No. 139, January–April 2014, p. 72.

⁴ Anthony J. Gittins, "Introduction to the Intercultural Workshop," CRC General Assembly Montreal, June 2014.

⁵ Anthony J. Gittins, "From Invitation to Inclusion to Radical Welcome," *op. cit.*

“...The Gifts of Each which Belong to All.”¹



This article on congregational charisms in an evangelizing Church is the fruit of my reading and reflection upon the papal document *Evangelii Gaudium*. The initial impulse to view this document through the lens of the charisms of religious institutes may have come from the frequent occurrence of the word ‘joy’ in the initial pages, calling to mind my own congregational charism captured in the phrase ‘to give joyful witness to love’ in article 1 of our Constitutions.

The thought of viewing the document through this lens certainly did not arise because any section of *Evangelii Gaudium* specifically addresses institutes of consecrated life or their charisms. Rather, *Evangelii Gaudium* is about the witness of the whole Church to the Gospel, the contemporary challenges to this mission, and the joy that should characterize bearers of the Good News, so its message is for all members of the Church.

Consecrated women and men get passing mention in article 78, along with other ‘agents of evangelization’ whose witness is deemed to be diminished by ‘heightened individualism, a crisis of identity, and cooling fervor’. There is also a reference to the scarcity of vocations to the priest-

hood and religious life in article 107. There are no other specific references to consecrated life. This comment on the scarcity of reference to the consecrated life is not intended to downplay the relevance of the document for religious. Indeed, it has much relevance for us in our contemporary culture and world.

To employ an image from the internet, I found within *Evangelii Gaudium* the link to consecrated life in the section titled ‘Charisms at the Service of a Communion which Evangelizes’, comprising articles 130 and 131. In article 130 we read:

“The Holy Spirit enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms...They are not safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather, they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the Church... A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God’s holy and faithful people for the good of all.”

This notion of charism is likely not new too many of us; it is the basis of our understanding of charism.

¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, Article 99, in the section entitled ‘No to Warring Among Ourselves’. The full sentence reads: “Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in **the gifts of each which belong to all.**” The phrase captures the place of charisms in the life of the whole body.

The Giftedness of our Charisms

However, it occurred to me that if religious congregations and their individual members intentionally approached this document from the perspective of the giftedness of their particular charisms, the evangelizing mission of the Church could be greatly enhanced.

A renewed appreciation of our particular charisms could be the center of energy from which we can take this inspiring and substantial document to heart. We understand charism and how it functions among us and in mission. We have the potential to be mentors for those not in religious life who are discerning their gifts for the mission of the Church. We have charisms that relate to some of the contemporary challenges presented in the document, and are already addressing some of these issues, moved by our charisms to do so.

Charisms and Contemporary Challenges

Following are a few examples to elaborate this latter point. One of the large challenges named is inclusion of the poor in society. Many religious congregations have mission to the poor at the core of their charisms or articulated in mission statements, which include working toward systemic change to improve the situation of those living in poverty. Federations of congregations with similar charisms, such as the Vincentian family, are working collaboratively to effect systemic change.

Other congregations have a strong presence in higher education, another area the document highlights for evangelizing presence. (EG 132-134) Articles 169 to 173 emphasize the need for personal and spiritual accompaniment of persons, yet another domain where the religious orders or individual religious have particular charisms. This is not an exhaustive list, but a sampling of arenas where congregational charisms are, or could be offered in the service of an evangelizing Church in transformation.

Might *Evangelii Gaudium* with the challenges and hope it conveys, be a moment for institutes of consecrated life to revisit and revitalize their charisms, for the greater service of our Church and the world? We are currently marking the Year of Consecrated Life, which could be an opportune time to read and contemplate *Evangelii Gaudium* in light of our unique congregational charisms. "Awaken the world with the passion of your charisms and your mission..." said Pope Francis when he announced the Year of Consecrated Life.

In an attempt to focus on charism, I have barely touched on the inspirational component of the document, which is one of the rewards of reading it. As one writer on the document states: "To describe *Evangelii Gaudium* as an inspiring document would be true, but...a more appropriate response, for individuals and communities, would be continual prayerful reflection on the text."² I would add reflection that leads to sound action for mission.

Questions for Reflection:

Considering our congregation's charism:

1. How do I treasure the charism?
2. How does it contribute to the mission of the Church?
3. What is the locus (local, national, international, systemic) in which this gift/charism could be active in light of *Evangelii Gaudium*?
4. What contribution are we capable of in our present circumstances as a congregation?

Keep in mind the fundraising slogan, which Pope Francis would likely endorse: 'No gift is too small'.

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² Richard Lennan, "Evangelii Gaudium: The Good News from Pope Francis" in *Compass* 48:1 (Autumn 2014): 8.

Contribution of Monastic Life to the Church's *Missionary Transformation*



In recent years, every document from the magisterium of Peter sounded like “Amen, amen, I say unto you.” And we really needed that. The Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* has a different tone to it! We hear something like: “Convert and believe in the Gospel!” This is a call to conversion addressed to all the baptized, to all the communities without anyone being able to get past it. This is a programmatic document which calls for “*the Church’s missionary transformation.*”

In it, consecrated life is hardly mentioned. We are not in the spotlight! So much the better: we will be of service! Of service to this *missionary conversion.*

Everyone? Even the nuns and the monks? Yes, and that is what I’d like to dig into here: **What could monastic life contribute to this missionary conversion?**

I think that its first contribution will be to let this call penetrate into the depths of our heart. Without fear! Without being scared of “losing” our vocation! On the contrary, it is rather a question of letting the Holy Spirit arouse in us a genuine passion for this *conversion* of the Church. To carry this *conversion* in our hearts. To desire this *conversion*—“*conversatio morum*”—of the whole Church.

Let us not forget: the call to solitude with God, this mysterious monastic call to live of God alone, does not remove us from the Church... It throws us into the heart of the Church. In fact, it is impossible to dive into God without diving into the heart of the Church, without loving the Church, and therefore without longing that it responds to the call of Christ who now asks it to “go forth.”

Are Nuns and Monks Going to Go Forth?

Certainly, we will not “go forth” and leave behind our life of solitude with God, because we were mysteriously called to it by the Lord himself. But we do need to **leave behind all the forms of self-absorption** in which we worry about our monastery, our order, our rule, our property, our future... *Spiritual worldliness* (cf. EG 93) is not absent from our monasteries and from our hearts. The Lord is calling upon us to pass through a good scanner to detect the presence.

We also need to **go forth away from all forms of community enrichment** and away from all complacency with respect to an economic system that continues to exclude the poor. It is not the monastic vocation that separates us from the poor: on the contrary, plunging into *contemplative* life opens one’s eyes to what the poorest are in the sight of God (cf. EG 199). Won’t the nun or monk seeking God find him in the smallest, the poorest? Starting with those in one’s own community.

The Testimony of Monastic Life

Go forth... and serve! Because the monastic life has a wonderful role to play in the *Church’s missionary transformation*. First of all, the role of giving witness. Our monasteries are laboratories of Christian living that can be sources of inspiration for Christians who visit us, physically or virtually, or who simply know that we exist.

Our essential testimony will be that of the priority of God, of the priority of prayer. Essential testimony because, for all Christians, there will

be no genuine “going forth” towards the other unless there is a “going forth” to God. Worship is the spring, the drive, the motor of a genuine missionary going forth. Monastic life testifies to *the deep breath of prayer* that the *Church urgently needs* (cf. EG 262).

But there is more: if our monastic life is evangelical, our life testimony will challenge the *primacy of the immediate and visible* (cf. EG 262). Our joy will overturn *sterile pessimism* (cf. EG 84). We will silently show that the desert is a favourable place to *rediscover the essential* (cf. EG 86) and that *obsession with appearance is vain* (cf. EG 97). Our fraternal life will speak about *the mystique of living together* (cf. EG 87), of the *mystical fraternity*, a contemplative fraternity that can see the sacred grandeur of our neighbour (cf. EG 92), far from all *individualism* (cf. EG 67).

Do we not have a silent word to say for putting an end to clericalism (cf. EG 102) and for opening paths to the full exercise of a feminine charism in the Church (cf. EG 103)? Do we not also have a valuable role in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue? And if our monasticism is urban, does that not testify to a *contemplative gaze on the city* so urgently needed today (cf. EG 71)? And one could continue thus to decline the wealth of monastic testimony—silent, hidden—but eventually visible, if only through our websites!

Offering Places for Renewal

The other role of the monastic life in the context of the *Church’s missionary conversion*, is to open our doors (cf. EG 46), to offer to everyone—especially to the baptized who are fully engaged in the world—spaces where they can be renewed (cf. EG 77), where people can relearn how to slow down (cf. 46). And if it is an urban monasticism, to offer a *space for prayer and communion* in the heart of the city (cf. EG 77). Monasteries will be places that serve as sources for new evangelization. Places where people learn the *lectio divina* (cf. 152), where we discover the value of the *via pulchritudinis*, the “way of beauty” (cf. EG 167) to reach the human heart. Places where there are nuns and monks available for support, with *respectful and compassionate listening* (cf. EG 171).

Prayer and Offering

But the great “service” of monastic life will remain first and foremost that of prayer, the prayer of a vigorous intercession for the Church, for the new evangelization.

This intercessory prayer does not take us away from true contemplation, because *authentic contemplation always has a place for others* (EG 281). How fruitful will be prayer, fasting, asceticism and labour offered for this Church *conversion!*

The apostolic exhortation does not say much about it, but it remains so very true that evangelization is based on the often hidden offering of those who suffer, the small, the poor and the contemplatives who are united in silence to the Passion of Jesus for his body which is the Church. As for the spiritual battle of the contemplatives, it allows them to look at the world from the “periphery” that is God’s silence, the night or the torments of the soul. And this is also communion in the dynamic of *missionary conversion*.

“Today, God asks us to leave our nest to be sent; even those who are cloistered are sent by their prayers so that the Gospel may spread throughout the world.” How can one not quote these words spoken by Pope Francis to the Superiors General in Rome on November 29, 2013?

A Challenging Force

So we can affirm: monastic life is not at all “**off to one side**” of the Church’s *missionary conversion*. It has so much to share, so much to give, mainly through its contemplative fervour, its love of the Church, its passion for the coming of the Kingdom!

But the charism of monastic life also places it in some ways on the margins of the Church, even in challenge to it. And that will also be fruitful, because the specific risk of the Church’s *missionary transformation* is to become deflected or sidetracked into apostolic activism or social profiteering. Monastic life, with its primacy of

God, prayer and liturgy, will have a challenging or arresting force, an indispensable “ministry of concern.” On condition that we never lose the truly mystical power of a life ploughed and seeded daily by *lectio divina*.

Monastic life will also exercise a ministry that the apostolic exhortation did not mention: that of the hope of heaven. We know it, but we so often forget it: monastic life has meaning only with an eye towards heaven. It says heaven, it sings Christian hope. Consecrated celibacy is primarily oriented towards an eternal life that it is anticipating joyously. Isn’t this testimony of hope an essential link in the new evangelization?

Choose to Be Small

What will the monasteries be tomorrow? Not islands of “holiness” in the midst of a sinful world, but rather islands of mercy that silently announce that God shows mercy to the entire world. Islands of joy that silently proclaim that the Gospel of joy is offered to any human being. Islands of hope that share the certainty of Pope Francis when, at the end of his exhortation, he places, the proclamation of the Book of Revelation: “Behold, I make all things new,” says the Lord (Rev 21:5; cf. *The Joy of the gospel*, 288).

And if monks and nuns made their own the key to the Church’s missionary conversion, which is hidden below the last line of the exhortation: “Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us.” Choose to be “small” ... Love being “small.” If we were faithful to this evangelical “smallness,” *would the Church not be transformed?* ...

To Delve Deeper:

What will be the contribution of my community to the Church’s *missionary conversion*?

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