

Change: A Path of Growth and Life

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The phenomenon of change has always existed and that is most fortunate, because it allows life to flow. That said, however, the changes occurring today are happening in ways that are so fast and complex. Among religious congregations of apostolic life in North America, to mention only those, one perceives a state of breathlessness because religious life must continually live through change. That is true for any other institution and the world in general. Yes, that's a fact!

I do not have to list the big shifts that we have undergone since the Second Vatican Council, because we are all aware of them. I would like to address a few malaises that we are feeling today and suggest some necessary attitudes regarding those malaises in order to LIVE fully the MISSION and great values of consecrated life. It is affirmed that this is not a crisis of vocations that consecrated life is undergoing, but rather a crisis of faith. This conclusion inhabits me deeply. Perhaps in our day we no longer know how to hear God speaking? Or if we do hear it, our faith is dominated by fear. Richard Rhor says that fear is the greatest enemy of faith and, consequently, of peace.

Tell the Whole Truth

As leaders, we have to tell the members the whole truth about the reality of the congregation and not try to protect them from the major concerns that it is dealing with, whether those concerns be aging and the significant decrease in numbers, the sale or transformation of our properties, the small number of recruits, the finances, the ever-increasing health care, etc.

For the TRUTH to be heard and accepted there should be times developed for discussion to enable the members to engage in exchanges that will allow them to understand and accept the reality, while expressing the emotions that are connected to it. It is an art to be able to express those emotions, especially when fear, resistance and anxiety dominate.

Despite the feelings of urgency that push and jostle us, let us invite ourselves to take the time to stop for a good while and listen deeply to ourselves. Otherwise, we remain focused on ourselves and the prophetic role of religious life disappears.

The full TRUTH is found in Gospel values supported by an unconditional reception of the preferential option for the poor.

Reduce Ambiguity

There are many causes of ambiguity. We only have to mention the impact of technology and information overload. It is not surprising, therefore, that we might experience a certain paralysis that inordinately delays our speaking out regarding great ecclesial and social injustices and the decisions we must take to update the MISSION entrusted to us.

To reduce ambiguity and to deal with it, Lynn M. Levo, CSJ, proposes the following; identify the stressors over which we have some control, avoid imagining consequences that have little possibility of arising, consider the risks as an adventure and not a probable danger. Finally, she encourages us to accept one's mistakes and the fact that

we don't always make good decisions, sometimes even that making a bad decision is better than not making any at all. (*The Occasional Papers, Living Transformation Summer 2016*, pp. 5-6)

In order to be able to do that, one has to make a lot of room for humility.

Avoid Polarization

Polarization, whether of the right or left, makes community life difficult and collective action nearly impossible. To express it simply in political parlance, people on the right protect the *status quo* and continuity, while people on the left advocate change and reform. Polarization only contributes to chaos and fundamentalist positions.

Neither the polarized left nor the polarized right can make life flow. One is forced to conjecture that the two movements must be in tandem. True prophets please nobody, neither the conservative nor the liberal movements.

Learning to live with the tensions that these phenomena produce is essential for being transforming agents. Letting go is a must for creating a climate of peace and trust. In addition, polarization does not allow one to go towards the periphery to live the prophetic character of consecrated life for the Church and for the world. Perhaps we are too much like the political movements?

Identity Crisis

The question of identity in consecrated life is a critical point for us venturing fervently into the future.

We women and men religious are recognized and identify ourselves too often through the institutions of education, health, social work or the *ad gentes* missions that we have valiantly built. Often on the peripheries and maintained through hard work, these developments earned us a glorious epic and elitist status. And now, for the last forty years and for several reasons, it is no longer possible for us to remain "in charge" of those projects and to maintain them. Hence, an identity crisis! It is not first and foremost the identity of the individuals that suffer, but rather the identity of our group, our foundation and our lifestyle.

It is not the first time that consecrated life finds itself in the desert. In the desert, the temptations to give up are great. We have lots of models that can inspire us to work on transforming consecrated life. And the model par excellence is Jesus; it is following him to which we are committed. The journey of Jesus led him to Calvary and that is where new life came to us.

I thank the CRC for allowing me to share this reflection at the beginning of a mandate to lead my congregation, the Grey Nuns of Montreal.