

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.

September 2010

In this issue:

DISCOVERING NEW FRONTIERS

"Are we not sent to go to the new frontiers?" An introduction to the Theological Commission's Bulletin. – *F. Antoine-Emmanuel, FMJ*

4. New Evangelization and its Surprises...

"True openness to the Gospel will lead us from surprise to surprise..."
– *Lorraine Caza, CND*

7. In the World without Being of the World...

Rick van Lier, OP, draws out "six ways of describing our relationship with the world with a different focus depending on the eras, the contexts and the ecclesial groups concerned."

10. Pope Francis and the Periphery

Timothy Scott, CSB, examines "what Pope Francis means when he speaks of the centre and the periphery and in particular its relevance for religious communities."

12. Building a Partnership of Cooperation in the Mission

"Is apostolic religious life able to discover new possibilities? What type of alliance can we develop with the laity for the mission?"
– *Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS*

14. A Place for Us... in Canada, in 2014?

"What more do we have to offer today?" Voices from the contemporary experience of women religious, from Canadian culture and from our Church stimulate our reflection. – *Lorraine d'Entremont, SC*

16. Journey within another Culture

The experience of the First Nations. – *Margaret Patricia Brady, OSB*

18. The Ultimate Frontier

How can we live the final passage of life? Accompanying the dying becomes a service par excellence. Two moving testimonies complete the article. – *Carmelle Bisson, AMJ*

22. At The Frontiers of Human Ecology

"The ecology of the human being from the perspective of the Beatitudes" constitutes one of the greatest challenges of contemporary ethics. What openness is announced as we go "to new frontiers?" – *F. Antoine-Emmanuel, FMJ*

Editorial Team

Jean Bellefeuille
 Joyce Murray, CSJ
 Yvon Pomerleau, OP
 Lorraine St-Hilaire, SNJM

Editor in Chief

Louise Stafford, FSP

Design and Layout

Caron Communications
 graphiques

For Information

Canadian Religious
 Conference
 2715 Côte Saint Catherine Rd
 Montreal (Quebec)
 H3T 1B6

Tel: 514 259-0856
 Fax: 514-259-0857
crc@crc-canada.org
www.crc-canada.org

News Briefs

Members of the Theological Commission

The CRC Theological Commission is composed of women and men religious from the different regions of Canada. The Commission has a twofold mandate: to reflect on the significance of consecrated life from a theological perspective that integrates both human and social sciences; to propose future venues that will actualise religious life in a creative and prophetic way. It is within the framework of this mission that, once a year, the Theological Commission publishes an issue of the CRC Bulletin. The members of the Commission are:

Carmelle Bisson, AMJ
 Lorraine Caza, CND
 Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS
 Timothy Scott, CSB
 Rick van Lier, OP
 Margaret Patricia Brady, OSB
 Lorraine d'Entremont, SC
 Antoine-Emmanuel, FMJ
 George T. Smith, CSB – representative of the Administrative Council
 Lorraine St-Hilaire, SNJM, – representative of the CRC office

The members of the Commission **are eager to enter into dialogue with you**, the readers of the CRC Bulletin. For this reason, you will find their email address at the end of each article. We encourage you to send them your comments, observations and questions.

Something New

In order to facilitate the reading of the articles and to give you the possibility of choosing one article in particular without having to download the entire CRC Bulletin, it has been decided that each article will also be published separately in the section entitled **Publications/Theological Commission** on the CRC website: www.crc-canada.org. Thus, you will be able to access the usual version of the Bulletin with its beautiful graphics and/or the article by article text version without illustrations.

CRC General Assembly

The next CRC General Assembly will take place in Montreal from **May 29 to June 1, 2014**, on the theme: *Beyond Frontiers: A Call to Transformation*, with guest speaker Father Anthony Gittins, c.s.sp.

DISCOVERING NEW FRONTIERS

Introduction

In 1975, Pope Paul VI wrote: “Religious, thanks to their consecration, are eminently willing and free to leave everything and to go and proclaim the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. They are enterprising and their apostolate is often marked by an originality, by a genius that demands admiration. They are generous: often they are found at the outposts of the mission...”

(Evangelii Nuntiandi, n° 69)

The call is clear: persons of consecrated life are sent “to the ends of the earth,” to “the outposts of the mission.”

Is this call not as urgent today as it once was? Are we not sent to new frontiers? Because religious life is the work of God, we are never finished being surprised! Consecrated life is not a thing of the past rendered irrelevant!

The surprising choices of the successors of Peter continue to seriously challenge us, as demonstrated in the article written by Lorraine Caza, CND. In his article, Rick van Lier, OP, points out that we haven’t finished responding to the gospel challenge of Jesus who asked us to be *in the world without being of the world*.

Are not the “outposts of the mission” the “existential peripheries” where Pope Francis is constantly sending us? Timothy Scott, CSB, takes a careful look at the words and actions of the Pope in his efforts to identify these peripheries, old and new, places we can no longer go alone. Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS, has us reflect on the alliance we can build together with the laity to start anew or to renew the mission.

And what do we do once we get to these “peripheries?” Lorraine d’Entremont, SC, poses questions of our experience, culture and traditions so as to discern what newness we can offer today’s world. There is certainly no lack of “frontiers” where we can sow the life of the Gospel. Pat Brady, OSB, presents us with a striking example by calling us to walk with the First Nations. Carmelle Bisson, AMJ, invites us to a reflection on the “ultimate frontier,” befriending death. She shares two moving testimonials of life and hope.

We conclude our Bulletin by turning to the future so as to identify the new frontiers we are called to deal with: the huge ethical issues of our times, the environment, the human being seen through the eyes of the Beatitudes.

The CRC Theological Commission wishes you good reading and safe travels to the frontiers where the Lord sends us and waits for us.

F. Antoine-Emmanuel, FMJ
Monastic Fraternities of Jerusalem
frjerusalem.montreal@yahoo.ca

New Evangelization and its Surprises...

For some time now the Church has been using the expression “New Evangelization,” not in the sense of a new Gospel but to signify a new way of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, the permanent mission of the Church since the Incarnation of the Word. We are called to study and implement the ideas contained in the exhortation that followed the Synod on the New Evangelization held in Rome in the fall of 2012. 2013 revealed, as if in anticipation, specific aspects of this New Evangelization so dear to the hearts of two eminent disciples of Jesus Christ: Benedict XVI and Francis.

I call the year 2013 in the Church the year of “papal surprises.” In this article I will examine three surprises from Benedict XVI: his resignation as Pope, the witnesses he chose to evoke in his Ash Wednesday homily on February 13, and the sharing of his experience of Vatican II on February 14. Regarding Francis, it will be his speech to the pre-conclave General Congregation, his letter to non-believers and his interview with Father Spadaro, SJ. It is my opinion that these six events contain precious secrets that will help us to think and live evangelization for the 21st century.

An Ending Filled with Surprises

“After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry... For this reason, and well aware of the seriousness of this act, with full freedom I declare that I renounce the ministry of Bishop of Rome, Successor of Saint Peter, entrusted to me by the Cardinals on April 19, 2005.” I would be interested to know more about the mysterious dialogue that must have taken place between Benedict XVI and Celestine V (1215-1296), the

last Pope to pose such an act... Indeed, it was a surprising decision imbued with profound humility, lucidity and a rare sense of freedom, an act that I believe opens a marvellous path of evangelization.

Two days after his resignation, Benedict XVI gave the homily on Ash Wednesday. He talked about the desert as being a place of conversion and spoke about the great conversions of Paul and Augustine. Then, even more surprisingly, he went on to name the great converts of the 20th century: Pavel Florenski, an agnostic who became a Russian Orthodox monk; Etty Hillesum, a young non-practicing Jew from Amsterdam who developed a great love for the Bible and Augustine, who before her death in Auschwitz came to love God and the practice of adoration; Dorothy Day, a militant socialist living in New York who was convinced atheistic communism was the solution to all social problems, was baptized and admitted to having an extraordinary attraction for prayer that even she could not understand.

Why did Benedict XVI choose these three figures? Their one commonality is their insatiable quest for God. His choices speak to the fact that his concerns were not limited to the Roman Catholic Church but to the question of what will become of God in the world. Would his concern have anything to do with the New Evangelization?

The following day, Benedict XVI talked about his experience of Vatican II, 50 years earlier when he was 35 years old. “There was an incredible sense of expectation. We were hoping that all would be renewed, that there would truly be a new Pentecost, a new era of the Church. There was a feeling that the Church was not moving forward, that it was declining, that it seemed more a thing of the past and not the herald of the future. And at that moment, we were hoping that this relation would be renewed, that it would change; that the



Church might once again be a force for tomorrow and a force for today.” His sharing made me realize the importance of considering the entire life-journey of the individual when relating it to the evangelization of persons and institutions.

Francis, a Man of Many Surprises

At one of the pre-conclave General Congregations the then Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio declared: “Evangelizing pre-supposes a desire in the Church to come out of herself. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries... When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick. In Revelation, Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks. Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in order to enter but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. The self-referential Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let him out... Put simply, there are two images of the Church: the Church which evangelizes and comes out of herself and the worldly Church, living within herself, of herself, for herself... Thinking of the next Pope: He must be a man who, from the contemplation and adoration of Jesus Christ, helps the Church to go out to the existential peripheries, that helps her to be the fruitful mother, who gains life from ‘the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing’.”

Pope Francis continues to surprise us every day since his first appearance as Pope announcing his election and chosen name. I’ll never forget the reaction of Christian Bobin: “Despite his age, the fact that he has only one lung, the fatigue and heaviness of the task, I see a new man, alive and vibrant who has deeply touched me... he knows where Christ lives better than we do.”

On September 11 Pope Francis surprised everyone with a letter he published in the newspaper *La República*. The letter written in an “affectionately congenial” style was his response to the critique of Eugenio Scalfari (who identifies himself as a non-believer not in the search of God) on the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*. Far from reacting in an aggressive manner to the ideas of this

well-known journalist, the Pope said he would be happy to have the “possibility to dialogue on a reality as important as that of faith.” This faith, said Francis, “is born from the encounter with Jesus, but could never happen without the Church.” He went on to say: “I feel at ease in listening to your questions and in seeking with you the ways through which we might perhaps begin a part of the way together.”

In his letter the Holy Father speaks of the reality of the cross as “there where Jesus shows Himself as the Son of God.” When speaking of the resurrection he says: “It is not to triumph over those who rejected him but to attest that ‘the love of God is stronger than death, the forgiveness of God is stronger than any sin’.” Francis says that Eugenio Scalfari is correct to think that the Incarnation of the Son of God is the core of faith.

It seemed to me that the rapid response from Pope Francis to Scalfari is a perfect example of what he means when he speaks about going to the existential peripheries of humanity. The tone as well as the content of the response reveal that Francis is not afraid to get to the heart of the matter. This was followed by a most unexpected phone call, an invitation to Scalfari to meet with his eminent interlocutor. We know this meeting took place because Scalfari spoke about it publicly.

The account of the interview conducted by his Jesuit confrere Antonio Spadaro, between the 19th and 29th of August, gives us even greater insight into this man of many surprises. For the purposes of this article I will limit myself to his comparison of the Church to a field hospital after a battle: “I can clearly see that what the Church needs today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful, it needs to be by their side. I see the Church as a field hospital after a battle. It’s pointless to ask a seriously injured patient whether his cholesterol or blood sugar levels are high! It’s his wounds that need to be healed. The rest we can talk about later. Now we must think about treating those wounds... treating the wounds... And we need to start from the bottom. The most important thing is the first proclamation: ‘Jesus Christ has saved you’... I dream of a Church that is both mother and pastor...”



We must also allow ourselves to be surprised by Benedict XVI: the style of his act of resignation as well as the action itself reveal a dimension of evangelization that is rarely highlighted. Our frailties can well be the place from which we are called to proclaim the Gospel. It is a fact that individually and communally we all experience days when our “doing” just doesn’t have the same reach, the same relevancy.

The idea of proposing three witnesses all at a different place in their lives... to go from agnosticism to belonging to a Christian church other than our own; to go from a life totally taken up with multiple amorous passions to a life of incessant dialogue with God; to go from a life conviction that atheistic communism is the solution to all problems to a life of social commitment at the service of the Gospel... is a marvellous way to broaden our concept of evangelization!

For Benedict to stop at the age of 85 and look back at what he was about at age 35 is another way to look at evangelization from a bit of a different angle.

By remaining attentive to the daily messages and actions of Francis we will see how true openness to the Gospel will lead us from one surprise to the next and we will discover the existential peripheries where we are called to go. We will not only learn that Jesus wants to come to us but that He wants to reach our sisters and brothers through us. We will be able to accept as gifts from God the opportunities to enter into dialogue with people wrestling with the same questions that disturb us. We will humbly accept the frailties of our Church. We will develop the attitudes of the caregivers in a field-hospital after a battle: we will heal the wounds with love and perseverance.

And now I ask you, what have we learned about THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL since November 26?

Lorraine Caza, *CND*
lorcaza@videotron.ca



In the World without Being of the World

The Stances of Consecrated Life

Pope Paul VI wrote in 1964: “The Church, as everyone knows, is not separated from the world, but lives in it.” However, he also pointed out that Christians have the duty to live in the world without being of the world, in keeping with the prayer of Jesus for His disciples: “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” (John 17:15-16) And the Church adopts this prayer as its own. (*Ecclesiam Suam*, n^{os} 42 and 62) These words of Paul VI express the tension which has been inherent in Christianity since its beginnings. It is a tension between belonging and identification with this world, between taking a critical distance vis-à-vis certain values termed “worldly” in a negative sense when judged in light of the heavenly world and adopting the values of the Reign of God.

This relationship with the world, sometimes affirming and sometimes critical, provides an interpretive key which helps to understand the evolution of religious life and, more generally, the diverse forms of consecrated life as we know them today. It is to this particular reading of history that you are invited.

Our starting point is the following: we will consider the “world” as an object before which we situate ourselves. Using a spatial analogy, it seems possible to draw out six ways of describing our relationship with the world. Each one has its highlights but none is exclusive. In reality, these stances or positions that we adopt vis-à-vis the world occur always in combination, with stronger or weaker accents depending on the eras, the contexts, the persons and the ecclesial groups concerned.

Withdrawal from the World

From the very first centuries of Christianity, a group of Christians, women and men, chose to live in the tension: they were in the world but at the same time they fled from it, whence the Latin expression *fuga mundi*. When we speak of flight from the world, we refer to a very ancient stance. It is that of the first monks and nuns who withdrew to the Egyptian deserts to live intimately with God through solitude and prayer. That was undoubtedly their primary motivation. Along with this radical desire to live for God alone, however, they also desired to live an authentic Christian life.

The Church of the 4th century was well established in the world. The era of persecutions was over. Little by little, Christians were finding a place in society. The Church became institutionalized and the original spirit, that of Jesus and of the first Christian communities, was weakening. The first monastic institutions, the *lavrás* and the monasteries, saw themselves as a critical alternative to the world and to the Church: to the world which threatened fidelity to the Gospel but also to the Church which was sometimes too complicit with the powers of the world. Withdrawal into the desert, later symbolically expressed by monastic cloister, constituted for many the true ideal of Christian life.

This alternative Christianity, while profoundly ecclesial, developed at a distance from the world without ever being totally cut off from it. In fact, the monastic desert was, paradoxically, a place often visited, even prized. The wise sayings or *apophtegms* of the Fathers and Mothers of the desert were considered gems of spirituality sought out by many Christians living outside the monasteries. Very early, monasteries were also implanted



in the heart of the cities. The desert moved, and the monastic enclosure acted as boundary.

With the appearance of the canonical and mendicant orders in the Middle Ages, the ideal of the desert, without disappearing, was combined with the ideal of the journey. The enclosure became apostolic. Monks left it to preach the Gospel. This shift became even more pronounced in the 16th century with the appearance of apostolic orders and congregations, then the appearance of male and female societies of apostolic life and, finally in 1947, with the approval of secular institutes.

However, contrary to what we might think, the progressive insertion of religious in the activities of the world through works of charity and evangelization in distant lands maintained something of its original spirit. Prior to Vatican Council II, for example, entrance into religious life, even if it were apostolic, was understood intellectually and spiritually as a “death to the world.” This way of thinking had different accents depending on the institutes.

The Council helped Christians in general and religious in particular to develop a more favorable stance in relationship with the world. One only has to reread the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes, The Church in the Modern World*, to be convinced of this, or *Lumen Gentium* which states: “Let no one think that their consecrated way of life alienates religious from other men or makes them useless for human society.” (n. 46) At the same time, *Perfectae Caritatis*, the conciliar decree on the renewal and adaptation of religious life, continued to refer to renunciation of the world. (n. 5a) The same concept is inscribed in Church law governing religious institutes — whether they be contemplative, mixed or integrally apostolic. It states that “the public witness to be rendered by religious to Christ and the Church entails a separation from the world (*a mundo separationem*) proper to the character and purpose of each institute.” (Code of canon law, can. 607) In short, withdrawal from the world continues, even today, to be a critical stance characteristic of consecrated life, and more specifically of religious life.

Above the World

A second stance: consecrated life above the world. Not only did persons committed to consecrated life consider themselves intellectually, spiritually and concretely “outside” the world, the state of life itself marked by the profession of the evangelical counsels has also long been understood as a “state of perfection” superior to other forms of Christian life, especially marriage. Ecclesiology before the Vatican Council II insisted strongly on the societal aspect of the Church: a hierarchically constituted body where states of life and ministerial functions occupied pre-determined ranks. Religious life in itself occupied a privileged place. Its perfection resided in the means to holiness which it promoted and in the eminent sign of the primacy of the divine to which it was a privileged witness. Religious life, and more broadly the diverse forms of consecrated life, stood in some way above the mêlée, in the Church as well as in relation to the world.

Concerning the relationship with the world, we have already shown the shifts that occurred with Vatican Council II. The reciprocal relationships between the states of life within the Church, combined with certain ministerial functions, had to be rethought. Chapter five of *Lumen Gentium* best expresses the shift from a hierarchical notion of vocations to that of complementarity among them. The sign value of religious life is maintained throughout the teachings of the Council. Religious life has a particular function within the Church. However, the central affirmation is that in the Church all are called to holiness: “It is expressed in many ways in individuals who, in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others.” (n. 39 *Lumen Gentium*) While maintaining the uniqueness and the mission of religious or consecrated life in the Church and in the world, it is from now on within a non-stratified framework that the identity of professed life has to be rethought.

In the World and at the Service of the World

It is evident that the Church is in the world. It is also evident that persons in consecrated life are inserted in the world in their own way. After all, we only leave the world when we die! However, an additional point must be considered: the Church and religious life are at the service of the world. In his first public address, Pope Francis wished to see the Church become a Church of the poor and for the poor.

A few decades before, the theologian Yves Congar had published a book entitled *Pour une Église servante et pauvre* (translated by Jennifer Nicholson: *Power and Poverty in the Church*). The idea is the same: The Church is called by the Lord to be in the world and at its service. The cover of Congar's book features a picture of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, for he came not to be served but to serve. If, as we have shown, insertion in the world requires a critical stance, this stance must never be far from the icon of the Servant Christ. This stance has been abundantly illustrated by many persons in consecrated life who have been attentive to the miseries of the world in the course of history.

Vis-à-Vis the World

The three previous stances already contain implicitly the next three stances. The first situates consecrated life vis-à-vis the world in a face-to-face critique which is also prophetic. In the biblical tradition, the prophet is the one who denounces, challenges and, at the same time, announces and proposes an alternative vision. From this perspective, it is possible that persons in consecrated life find themselves in the position of challenging the world in the very name of their faith and of the charism which they embody. Certain radical actions such as the preferential option for the poor and the excluded concretize this attitude. In addition, the three important gospel values which characterize consecrated life, chastity, poverty and obedience, shock and challenge the established order.

Following the World

If consecrated life can be identified with prophecy, it can also be marked by cowardice. To bend the knee before the world is not the stance of Servant, but may be submission to the idols of the world. Consecrated life might follow the world and be controlled by it. Worldliness in consecrated life acts like gangrene: it eats it up from the interior to the point of making it insignificant. By this very fact, it is condemned to die or it is challenged to reform itself. There are many examples of this in history.

Ahead of the World

Finally, always within the context of prophecy, consecrated life can announce and implement viable alternatives for the Church and for the world. In that case, it is ahead of the world and leads it. For example, could not our intergenerational and intercultural communities be considered laboratories for humanity on the world stage? That is one of the topics of the next General Assembly of the CRC: *Beyond Frontiers: A Call to Transformation*. The different stances of consecrated life that we have described could be considered a first step in the coming reflections.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) With which one or which ones of the six stances presented do you identify personally?
- 2) Given the spirituality and mission of your institute, in which stance do you find yourself?
- 3) Which one of these stances challenges you to change your vision and action?

Rick van Lier, OP
rick.vanlier@ipastorale.ca

POPE FRANCIS AND THE *PERIPHERY*

Introduction

The Church is collectively catching its breath in these extraordinary months following the election of Jorge Bergoglio to the chair of Peter. Through his genuine kindness and easy familiarity with people of every religious viewpoint and attitude, we are witnessing nothing less than a recasting of the Petrine office. The Church is embracing a servant leader who, inspired by the *Poverello* of Assisi, has cast aside the trappings of the papal court.

A recurring theme in these first months is what Pope Francis calls “the periphery.” In a pre-conclave speech to his fellow cardinals that may well have sealed his election, he provided an insight into his agenda for the Church.

There is a tension between the centre and the periphery... We must get out of ourselves and go toward the periphery. We must avoid the spiritual disease of the Church that can become self-absorbed: when this happens, the Church itself becomes sick. [...] Between a Church that goes into the street and gets into an accident and a Church that is sick with self-referentiality, I have no doubts in preferring the first. (Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to the pre-conclave General Congregation of the Cardinals, March 2013)

I would like to examine what he means by the centre and the periphery, and in particular its relevance for religious communities as they determine their apostolic engagements.

Finding the Periphery

One could look at various groups and decide whether they occupy the periphery in societal terms, or ecclesial terms, or both. Migrant workers, undocumented persons and street people seem to be situated both at the socio-economic

and ecclesial periphery. In Western Europe and North America, gay and lesbian or divorced and remarried Catholics experience virtually no social stigma but often find themselves relegated to the periphery of Church life.

One could reverse the equation. Devout Catholics who publicly oppose abortion and same-sex marriage occupy a kind of ecclesial centre in terms of their adherence to magisterial teaching, but their views are increasingly at odds not only with civil society, but even with a significant number of self-identified Catholics. Traditionalist Catholics as well share an ecclesial experience of marginalization.

Is it possible to speak of a doctrinal periphery? *Lumen Gentium* gave us a tool to understand how not all Church teachings are equally important, particularly in terms of their relationship to the central revelation of Christ. But I think the weighting is theological rather than sociological, and it would be misleading to suggest that Catholics’ self-understanding is predicated on such a hierarchy.

When comparing doctrines with one another, they [i.e., theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith. (Documents of Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11)

I think Francis’ approach to the periphery needs to be interpreted in light of another closely related message. In an audience for journalists only days after his election, he set forth his agenda in the clearest possible terms: “And how I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor.” [*E como vorrei una chiesa povera e per i poveri!*] (Address to members of the communications media. March 16, 2013)

Poverty in a New Light

It seems that poverty, heretofore the province of consecrated men and women, has been extended by Francis to the Church as a whole. Further, the intended periphery now comes into focus: he is calling the Church (including his fellow bishops and religious superiors!) to discard the trappings of wealth and identify with those who are materially poor.

Pope Francis' embrace of poverty at the periphery was particularly evident in two symbolic gestures. On Holy Thursday he celebrated the Mass of the Lord's Supper in the *Casal del Marmo* juvenile detention facility and washed the feet of several young offenders including a young Muslim woman. Later in July, his first trip outside of Rome took him to the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, situated only 110 km from the Tunisian coast. Hundreds of African and Middle-Eastern migrants had died in those waters attempting to reach the European periphery and escape the chaos of the Arab spring.

In his homily at Lampedusa, he lamented what he called the anesthesia of the heart: "We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion — "suffering with" others; the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!" (Homily July 8, 2013)

In Canada, we have seen many religious who have concretely demonstrated the opposite of indifference in their ministries. We have witnessed an outreach to single mothers, immigrants, persons suffering from drug addictions and psychological disabilities, sex workers, and aboriginal women and men in the inner city. We share the question posed by the rich young man in the Gospel: what more remains for us to do in our faithfulness to Christ?

Poverty and Sacramentality

Francis' call for us to embrace the periphery is explicitly Christocentric. In a meeting at the Jesuit Refugee Centre in Rome, he chastised communities who were creating tourist "bed and breakfasts" from strategically-located former religious houses:

Empty convents don't belong to you; they are for *the flesh of Christ*, the refugees. The Lord calls us to welcome them courageously and generously into empty communities, religious houses and convents. (Visit to the *Centro Astalli* for Refugees, September 10, 2013)

He has identified a new and startling sacramentality in our engagement with the poor who are transfigured into Christ's own flesh. It calls to mind the invitation of Pope Paul VI of almost forty years ago. His Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* indicated the importance of proclamation and teaching, but more forcefully identified Christian witness as a key constituent in evangelization.

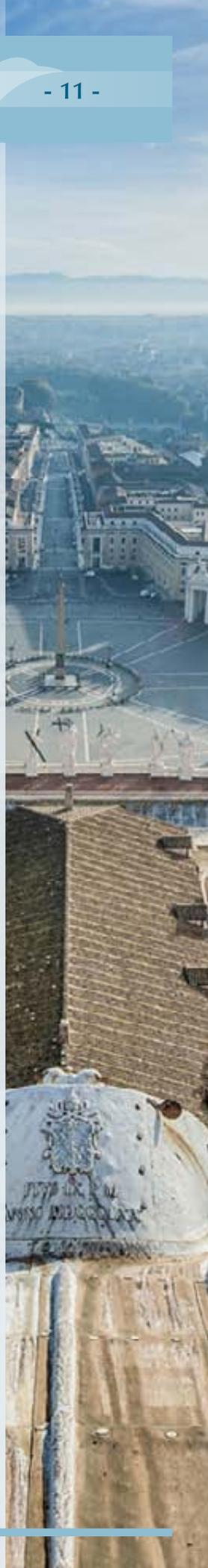
It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus — the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity. (Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975. 41)

One has the sense that Francis is incarnating the essence of Pope Paul's clarion call. We are witnesses to an unexpected and inviting kind of holiness that may well transform the Church. The question remains for us religious: Have we the courage to take to heart a call to conversion of heart that is both disquieting and profoundly evangelical?

Questions

- 1) Where is the centre and where is the periphery in my ministerial engagements?
- 2) What would it mean for my community to embrace the periphery?
- 3) How is Pope Francis' call resonating in our communities today?

Timothy Scott, CSB
tscott@basilian.org



Building a Partnership of Collaboration in the Mission

Is apostolic religious life capable of inventing new possibilities? The question touches into the very core of the frailty of the future of a good number of institutes of consecrated life. And yet, the frailty produced by the upheavals that affect our community life and apostolic achievements dispose us to discover the little breach that might allow an *otherness* to emerge for the good of the mission and our communities.

This transition requires that we proclaim in a prophetic manner that the Church is the People of God by accepting to share the mission with the laity. On this path of partnership we see that which is *already there*¹, *what has been accomplished and what remains to be done*. In order to better understand the meaning and the significance of this partnership in the mission, we will look at the ecclesial foundation on which it rests, try to understand the idea of partnership and identify some of the conditions for its implementation.

Ecclesial Foundation

Vatican II opened new horizons. It asked us to create a community based on partnership between women and men. It insisted that we enter into dialogue with one another and establish relationships founded on solidarity with the entire human family. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1) It identified the Church as the People of God, community (*Lumen Gentium*, 8) and communion (*LG*, 13) between brothers and sisters who are all equal in Jesus Christ, called to serve Christ because of our baptismal consecration and because we share a common vocation of holiness. (*LG*, 32 and 40)

It reaffirmed the missionary dimension of the Church (*Ad Gentes*, 5), the fact that all baptized persons, clerics, lay and religious alike are sent to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to mutually help one another. The Church, says Vatican II, is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men and women, unless there is a laity worthy of the name. (*AG*, 21) Because we are created beings and because we are baptized we are all partners in humanity and in the Church, and therefore co-responsible for the life and mission of the Church.

The Definition of Partnership

Exactly what do we mean by partnership? The word refers to a relational model where each person is considered equal and differences are respected, a model which includes a voluntary commitment of solidarity at the service of the mission. It supposes a movement from independence to interdependence, a relationship where each one is able to adjust her or his role and actions for the greater good of the other.

True partnership cannot be reduced to mere participation, collaboration, consultation or agreement. Although all of these elements are present in a partnership they are not what makes it complete. True partnership happens when all of the parties concerned are integrated, invested and co-responsible for the realization of the desired goal. Although a partnership does not require that all of the stakeholders be equal when it comes to means, status, and performance it does require an adaptation in the distribution of the roles and a commitment of unconditional solidarity with the other at the service of the shared mission.²

¹ See the experience of the Company of Jesus: "Collaboration at the Heart of the Mission," Decree 6, 35th General Congregation of the Company of Jesus, 2008.

² Hervé Legrand, "The Importance of Tradition for Partnership between Christians in the Church" in *Pleins feux sur le partenariat en Église. Actes du symposium. Le partenariat hommes et femmes en Église*, Paulines, 1997, p. 106.

Conditions for a Partnership of Collaboration in the Mission

The transition to collaborative partnership in carrying out the mission of our congregations is not without risk. It displaces our borders, destabilizes us, questions our identity and our way of doing things after such a long time, forces us to rethink our relationship and actions with the laity and challenges us to see others as true partners in our apostolic action. It requires that we break with the familiar, relinquish our past glories, live a conversion of mentality and walk towards uncertainty, the unknown, the unforeseeable in response to the call to create a space of *visitation*³ and invent a new relationship by building together a sense of belonging and alliance in the mission.

Creating an alliance of true partnership and mutual responsibility between religious and laity at the heart of a project for the mission is going to be a major relational challenge. It means that each of the parties has to accept its incompleteness as well as its strengths and differences, establish a relationship where they allow themselves to be displaced by the other, each one accepting to let go in order to conceptualize the mission and build a common project together. (Lasida, 109)

Dialogue founded on respectful listening, trust and creativity leads to a project that can be classified as an alliance (Lasida, 111) where together we are able to accept the uncertainty and the unforeseeable, where risk is lived in a spirit of solidarity and where bonding is transformed into communion in the building up of an *apostolic corps*.

A partnership of cooperation brings the parties together in a relationship marked by co-responsibility and co-creation. The relational guarantee of this alliance requires accompaniment, formation, guidance to limit the risks, and the capacity to create a sense of belonging. (Lasida, 127) The pooling of the strengths and differences of each one, far from levelling them, contributes to the development of mutual respect and the validation of the subject at the service of the mission. That is how *prophets, wisdom figures and apostles* (Lasida, 286-288) combine their efforts to bring to the fore the creative imagination and collective intel-

ligence of the group, to guide the group when dealing with the limits of the reality and to name the partnership being born.

Conclusion

The frailty generated by the crisis that has struck a large number of congregations can be an opportunity to liberate the future. It makes us search for possibilities, it forces us to reach out to the other, to risk a part of the journey together, to re-ignite relationships that allow life to spread, flourish and multiply. (Lasida, 133)

Such an experience is part of a long process that demands we make choices, that we get beyond our navel gazing, that we remain connected with our neighbour and enter into an alliance with others so as to dare to live the mission in a *different* way. The transition we've begun in a spirit of acceptance, openness and shared risk opens the way for the culture of partnership⁴ that highlights a new way of being together, relationships founded on reciprocity and the creation of bonds that can lead to a renewed sense of the Church as the People of God. Finally, within this prophetic movement where a new alliance is created, the identity of each one is seen as grace, much to the surprise of the others as they discover the unique treasures present in each of the partners. (Lasida, 225)

Questions for Reflection...

- 1) Name the reality in your religious congregation and what would allow you to risk a partnership with others in the carrying out of your mission.
- 2) A formation session entitled, *Faire route ensemble vers une culture partenariale* is presently being offered. For more information, contact the secretariat of the Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec (AÉCQ).

Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS
gaetane.guillemette@gmail.com

³ Elena Lasida, *Le goût de l'autre. La crise, une chance pour réinventer le lien*, Albin Michel, 2011, p. 99.

⁴ *Cahiers de spiritualité ignatienne*, "Vers une culture partenariale en Église," n° 117, 2006.

A Place FOR US... in Canada, in 2014?

“The times cry out, not for huddling holy remnants, but for religious groups that can come together and work together to ensure that Canadians can experience the best that faith brings to life... and to death.” — Reginald Bibby in A New Day

It almost goes without saying that, as religious orders in Canada, many of us are concerned about the viability of our congregations and wondering what ministries we can undertake, given the rising average age of our members. In this article, I aim to draw your attention to some resources that have stimulated my reflection about possible new options and orientations for ministry for religious in our Canadian context, in the hope that these resources may stir your thoughts.

My framework for presenting these resources, and their possible implications for discernment and action, is that of theological reflection in ministry. In this model, three sources of information are considered relevant for arriving at pastoral/ministry decisions: the Christian tradition, cultural resources and personal and/or communal experience. Tradition here refers to all that scripture and Christian history have bestowed to us, including our Church and religious congregation.

Theological reflection involves seeking out significant information from these three sources, examining how each source informs the others and, finally, moving toward communal action. While it is not possible to do a thorough theological reflection in this short article, I will highlight voices from the contemporary experience of women religious, from Canadian culture and from our Church that offer important material for our consideration.

A Voice from Experience

Sandra Schneiders, well-known to many of us as a religious and a theologian writing on religious life, in a 2011 lecture entitled *“That Was Then...*

This Is Now”¹ speaks of sisters experiencing a certain “placelessness” in ministry in the post-conciliar Church. She attributes this to the new theology of ministry arising from Vatican II, saying that women religious “are something for which the Church as an ecclesial ministerial structure has, historically, no category.” She sees the decline or disappearance of institutions in which sisters traditionally served as another component of this placelessness.² She speaks both as a theologian and a religious with extensive knowledge of the history and current experience of women religious. While the lecture could be viewed as a theological reflection in itself, well worth reading, what I want to highlight are her observations around age and ministry.

She engages resources from the culture in her reflection by taking into account a new envisioning of the life-cycle pattern by various branches of the social sciences. When this new definition is applied to the active phase of religious life, which used to run from 18 to 55 or 60, it will now run from 30 to 85 or 90 with the most productive part of this life span likely being 50 to 75, rather than 35 to 45.

Approximately a third of the lecture is devoted to the post-conciliar experience of change in the focus and character of sisters’ ministries. Schneiders clusters the varied ministries that have arisen into four main groups: social justice ministries; hands-on ministries to those experiencing social injustice, natural disasters or other misfortunes, and intellectuals, scholars or artists seeking to express the Gospel in the language of our time. She identifies a fourth cluster of “ever more urgently needed ministries... concerned with the thirst for meaning and transcendence of so many people in our world, whose urgent personal quest for psychological and spiritual growth and wholeness... often finds little or no spiritual nourishment in institutional religion of any stripe.”³

¹ See sources for full particulars about this lecture.

² *That Was Then...* pp. 26-27.

³ *That Was Then...* p. 31.



Sainte-Blaine Church, Richmond, Quebec — © Meunier / Shutterstock

A Voice from Canadian Culture

The extensive sociological research of Reginald Bibby, over 30 years, on religious culture in Canada strongly supports the need for this fourth category of ministries. He believes that the status of religion/no religion in Canada rests upon the good ministry or lack of it of the major church denominations in the country. He underscores the need for ministry to the same category of persons Sandra Schneiders describes.

Here are just a few pertinent nuggets from his vast research. Religion in Canada is not dying, but persisting in new expressions in a changed environment. Many who do not affiliate with a church, or do so only marginally, indicate that faith is important to them. Rather than categorize people as churched or unchurched, we should view them as having different levels of affiliation with a particular denomination. Religion in Canada would be strengthened by good ministry efforts of churches to reach out to their “marginally affiliated” and “disaffiliated” (terms used by Bibby) members. He envisions these efforts being carried out by intentional networking groups of church congregations. Roman Catholics, the leading group by numbers, have the highest level of identification with their church, whether or not they are practising. It seems we are a ripe field for this kind of outreach ministry.

Voices from Our Tradition

With the arrival of Pope Francis, we are hearing a strong voice for ministry to the marginalized of our Church and the world. (See the articles by Lorraine Caza and Timothy Scott in this Bulletin.) Additionally, national and local Church initiatives around New Evangelization are calling us to what I will term ministries of invitation and accompaniment.

Sources

Bibby, Reginald. (2012). *A New Day: The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada*. Lethbridge: Project Canada Books.

Go to www.reginaldbibby.com for full information on Bibby's research, books and publications.

Schneiders, Sandra M. (2011). *That Was Then... This Is Now: The Past, Present and Future of Women Religious in the United States*. South Bend: Center for Spirituality, Saint Mary's College. Lecture given in conjunction with the exhibit *Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*.

Whitehead, James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. (1995). *Theological Reflection in Christian Ministry, Revised Edition*. Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward.

Voices Together

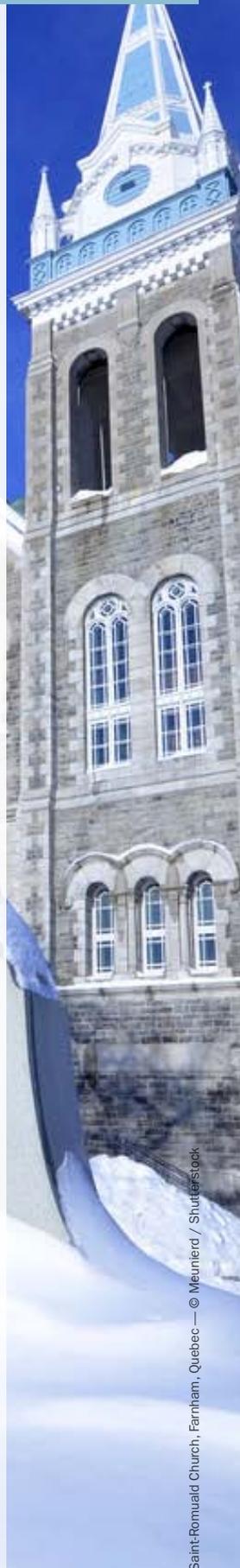
At this point, I muse... Could this — networking, accompaniment, invitation — be a place for ministry for religious in later adulthood?... We have networks that connect us to many people... We know our Church ‘for better or for worse’... It would be meeting people personally in their spiritual quest, as both Schneiders and Bibby suggest is a great need, which we also recognize... Some of us have skills for spiritual accompaniment... It would be a contribution to the religious fabric of Canada.

Thus goes my preliminary attempt to bring together the voices I have heard from experience, culture and Tradition. Continuing with the image of voices, I liken this phase of a theological reflection to attempting to bring the various parts of a song or musical composition together to blend in harmonious and enhancing ways. But this is not the end of the theological reflection, which is complete only when a pastoral action or ministry plan is determined. When the music is together, the choir needs to decide where it will perform or go on tour!

I leave the rest of the reflection to you, with some questions.

- 1) Does any aspect of this information resonate with you? How?
- 2) What other voices from Tradition, culture and experience would you add?
- 3) Does it spark any thoughts about possible new ministry initiatives for you or your congregation?
- 4) How do you respond to Bibby's challenge quoted at the head of this article?

Lorraine d'Entremont, sc
lorain@setonspiritualityctr.ca



JOURNEY WITHIN ANOTHER CULTURE

During the last three and a half centuries, many religious communities have worked with and ministered to Aboriginals in hospitals and other health care facilities. Although this was a time of governmental forced acculturation for them, many Aboriginals became Christians and benefited from western schools and medical services. It appears that First Nations have begun to come full circle. A people who was voiceless in the past is now coming into its own.

Entering a Foreign Culture

In the late 1980s, the Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (now Canadian Association for Spiritual Care) held a conference at the Empress Hotel in Victoria, B.C. Aboriginals were invited to address gathered participants on issues which would benefit their sick during a hospital stay. Six Aboriginal speakers agreed that, like most people admitted to hospitals, they experience anxiety, alienation and fear because everything is unfamiliar. Add to this the experience of entering a foreign culture that does not understand your culture, customs, values and practices and you have an Aboriginal's experience of a hospital stay.

The Medicine Wheel

In order for non-Aboriginals to understand what Aboriginals need, some cultural elements must be considered and understood. The four directions of the medicine wheel are important to Aboriginal spirituality. While the circumference represents

wholeness, North signifies wisdom personified by the buffalo and the color white; South gifts one with innocence signified by the mouse and the color green; East's gift is illumination and it is represented by the color yellow; West gives introspection represented by the bear and the colour black. What does this have to do with hospital stays of Aboriginal people? Direction of beds — these should not face East, the direction of the Morning Star, Christ, who comes to take the soul to its eternal home. Even though a patient might be terminal, chances are they may not. Rather than evoke death, healing and wellness should be called forth.

Life is Communal

For Aboriginal people, life is communal. One is born into family, clan, tribe — one is never alone but part of a larger whole. Bearing this in mind, visits should not be unduly limited. Talk is not necessary but wordless presence is of paramount importance.

At times, simple Aboriginal rituals will be celebrated. All who are present surround the sick person's bed. Each one breathes or gently chews on the invalid's exposed navel, sharing their life-giving spirit, breath and wellness with the sick. For Aboriginals, the navel is the seat of consciousness. Often medicine bags contain a small section of the umbilical cord whereby life and breath were first shared in the mother's womb before and during birth. Visitors share their life-breath with the sick so they may continue to heal and share their life-spirit with others.



Returning to Spirit¹

Throughout Canada “Returning to Spirit,” a program for personal healing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, has been offered since 2001. It is a tripartite process wherein all participants see themselves in need of healing. Residential schools, abuse and other issues may be addressed. The first week grapples with where each one is stuck and unable to heal. The second week has both groups meet separately to review the first week, assess how one listens and receives, so that each may come to conversation open to receive. Aboriginals take the initiative in the third session, approaching non-Aboriginals inviting them to one-on-one intentional conversations. Here there is no blame; all share the truth of their experience to become freed from past hurts so reconciliation might begin and new possibilities arise. Many members of religious communities who worked in residential schools, in hospitals and on reserves have participated in “Returning to Spirit” since they too were scarred by the forced acculturation of which they were wittingly or unwittingly a part. No one could have foreseen or anticipated the devastating and long-lasting results.

A New Future

In the last five years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission² travelled across Canada to discuss the emotional, physical and mental damage resulting from Canada’s residential schools. At the same time as the Commission was held in B.C., B.C. First Nations were making final adjustments to take over health services on all reserves in the province. Sto:lo Tribal Council Grand Chief Doug Kelly, chairman of the First Nations Health Council, views this as a great departure from colonialism and as real progress. Now a new future stretches out before our Aboriginal brothers and sisters and non-Aboriginal people who were involved in the Residential Schools in Canada.

Questions

- 1) If you or your community have been part of the residential school system, lived on a reserve or worked in health care for First Nations people, what was the richness of the experience?
- 2) Did you ever live within a culture other than your own? What was it like?

Margaret Patricia Brady, osh
pcbrady@shaw.ca

¹ For more information, go to www.returningtospirit.org.

² For more information, go to www.trc.ca.



THE ULTIMATE FRONTIER

Going through a border post for the first time is not necessarily an easy experience. Entering or leaving a country and having to report to a customs officer can be a source of anxiety for some. The same is true when it comes to the mandatory passages of life, the ones never before experienced and those that will be experienced but once, such as the final passage when we render our last breath to enter a land unknown, even though it is said to be filled with promise of happiness for all eternity.

The Border Crossing Syndrome

How can we live the final crossing and not experience the “border crossing syndrome” that can strike anyone, even those who consecrated their entire life to God? This syndrome unleashes the morbid fear there is someone out to get us, closing in on us to the point of strangulation, a terrible feeling that causes tremendous anxiety. It is the dark cloud of the fear of being condemned, damned, the haunting feeling that we might have been wrong, the quasi-certainty that faith was but an illusion and that we might as well get this done with as fast as possible. And the spiral begins over and over again. Is it right for a person consecrated to God to have such thoughts? And what if God doesn’t exist? What if it was just a pipe dream and the whole thing is about to collapse? What if there really is nothing!

We have to admit that we all have, in our religious communities, brothers and sisters who go through this terrible state that little by little becomes all consuming. Often they are persons

who had heavy responsibilities to bear or who discreetly dedicated their entire lives to the mission. In their new-found reality as recluse they find themselves dispossessed of everything, forced to face their poverty, with no choice but to go within.

Some of our members experience this as a privileged time to renew their alliance with the God of fidelity, while others live a dramatic struggle with this pilgrimage within. The physical condition that brought them to the infirmary of the congregation or to a long-term-care facility can sometimes cause them to become demanding, bitter and prone to panic, with a tendency to keep their hands on “the call bell” which in the long run becomes like a “clanging cymbal.” I am not exaggerating when I say that this constant ringing ends up becoming an “irritant,” a source of exasperation for all those around. Who could ever imagine that this apparently harmless reiterated ringing is really a call similar to that of the apostle Paul when he asked: “Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Rom 7, 24)

Analyzing the Anguish

How can we relieve and even befriend this anguish? Who among the team of caregivers is able to grasp the depth of the state of anguish experienced by certain brothers and sisters whose cry is close to that of Jesus in Gethsemane when he prayed: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me!” — veritable night of the senses, true night of the soul.



Accompanying the Dying: Service Par Excellence

In the past, our seniors in need of assistance were accompanied and cared for by their sisters and brothers in community. Today, we more and more entrust their care to lay people who, despite being well trained to do their job, are not necessarily capable of providing the spiritual care required by those who have dedicated their entire life to the service of God. These caregivers know what dose of medication must be administered to alleviate pain, but it is beyond their competence to understand the psycho-spiritual suffering related to the end of life, much less the type of comforting required by someone who has reached this stage. Those who have consecrated their life to God are no different from anyone else; they too need to be accompanied across the threshold to Life without borders.

Within a context where secularism is infiltrating our milieu of life, what can we do to help our members cross the final border in a spirit of “paschal obedience” as expressed by Marie-Ancilla, *op*?¹ In the same vein, the ideas of Jean Tauler, theologian and XIVth century mystic, push us to an in-depth reflective meditation on this question for, according to him, anguish is not a bad thing but rather the second degree of mystical life.² It therefore becomes imperative that we be able to identify the type of anguish being experienced by our brother and sister.

We have to admit that our health-care facilities are not exempt from the influence of the mass media where we promote the ideas of “dying with dignity,” “freedom to choose when to die” or the “I love you enough to help you put an end to your pain.” They are so many different disguises to avoid saying the word euthanasia. Proof of this is the film *Amour* where the last scene places us face to face with this reality.³

It is important to recall the words of John Paul II: “When the moment finally comes for uniting oneself to the supreme hour of the Lord’s Passion, the consecrated person knows that the Father is now bringing to completion the mysterious process of formation which began many years before [...] At such times, the sensitive closeness of the Superior is most essential. Great comfort can also come from the valuable help of a brother or sister, whose concerned and caring presence can lead to a rediscovery of the meaning of the covenant which God originally established, and which he has no intention of breaking. The person undergoing such a trial will then accept purification and hardship as essential to the following of Christ Crucified. The trial itself will appear as a providential means of being formed by the Father’s hands, and as a struggle which is not only psychological, carried out by the “I” in relation to itself and its weaknesses, but also *religious*, touched each day by the presence of God and the power of the Cross!”⁴

Question for reflection

I heard a voice saying: “Whom shall I send, who will go for us?” Isaiah answered: “Here I am Lord, send me.” (Isaiah 6, 8)

Carmelle Bisson, *AMJ*
carmellebisson@yahoo.ca

¹ Marie-Ancilla, *op*, *Foi et guérison. Repères et critères chrétiens*, Marseille, Éditions La Thune, 2008, p. 76.

² Jean Tauler, *op* “Sermon XL et Sermon XLI” dans *Sermons de Tauler*, Tome II, Éditions de la Vie Spirituelle, Paris, 1927-1935, p. 211-212, 217.

³ Allusion to the film *Amour* (2012) by Michael Haneke that many said to be “super,” where one of the last scenes is a death by asphyxiation, followed by a suicide.

⁴ Jean-Paul II, *Consecrated Life*, Post-Synod Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Montreal, Médiaspaul, 1996, n° 70,6.7.



THE ULTIMATE FRONTIER

Two Testimonies

— Collected by Carmelle Bisson, AMJ

Why I Choose to Live at 95 Years of Age

Being a gift of Love, life is a free gift and I am not at liberty to do just anything I want with my life. I grew up in a large family where music had a prominent place, with singing, dancing and musical instruments. We used to spend entire evenings simply sharing love among us. I thought it was beautiful, but I told myself in my heart, “this will pass, it’s temporary, but you, Lord, will remain with me for my entire life, and thereafter.”

Of course I look forward to meeting Him. Whatever his timing for me, I surrender, but I really wish to keep my memory. I feel it would be lazy of me, a lack of generosity, wishing to go before my time... But I have another wish, that of dying in my sleep. Before going to sleep, I ask forgiveness... so why not go in my sleep!

I don’t understand why people around me keep repeating “I want to die,” and why they are sad. As for myself, I dare think and believe that all my sisters seek the will of God in all matters. If I’m not willing to follow God’s will, I say that’s a recipe for purgatory. I’m spending my last years doing small favours for my sisters and offering everything to the Lord. “My response to the God of Love: For you, Lord Jesus, I agree to be silent so you know that you are my Love. When I am silent, that’s when I encounter Love. Grant me the grace to keep silent, and to love you.”

All I said here was spoken off the cuff, but it comes from deep inside my heart.

A Sister, aged 95 years

Why I Choose to Live at 92 Years of Age

Life Is the Most Beautiful Gift from Heaven!

When He created me, God began pulling a thread which only became stronger over the years. How long is this thread? Nobody knows when it will end. But beware! God said: “I am the alpha and the omega.” This is only a life in progress. It doesn’t belong to me. Did Jesus not also say: “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full?” Between these two poles of the alpha and the omega, I must strive to become more fully human until I become transfigured into the image of Christ the Redeemer. I welcome life — today — tomorrow, and until the term decreed by Him who is the omega.

Will I fear the unfolding of my life into my late years? Why should I? I consider my life: At the age of three, I was able to ride my tricycle under my father’s watchful eye, not without fear and without falls, yet with trust in my father’s power. A few years later, I rode a bicycle. How many falls and how much fear until I could master my bicycle! So it will be with my life as it unfolds, “fears and falls” under God’s watchful eye. Now a true senior, I welcome life with gratitude to my heavenly Father until He chooses to call me by name: _____, come and take this place I have prepared for you... 10 years?... 15 years?... I don’t know. But that’s a mere drop in the ocean compared to blessed eternity.



At 92 years of age, I have traded my bicycle for a walker, a human marvel invented for my well being. In fact, it's also a true gift from heaven since, despite my age, I can still enjoy family life and the possibility of participating, through small acts of kindness, in the life of people around me.

Very slowly, another path is opening up under my feet, that of the Cross with its cognitive and physical impairments. Should I be astonished and disheartened? Of course not! Another word of Jesus feeds my confidence. Did He not say, "I am with you always?" Furthermore, isn't it an outstanding grace to follow Jesus through this painful life at the centre of which He has remained since I was baptized and speaks of transfiguration leading to the glorious resurrection? So then, why worry? The Church is always present to restore hope, a faint light that flickers at times, yet never dies out. The Church is forever present to refresh my soul (the sacraments).

I hope to be graced with the beautiful virtue of hope, to keep me from wishing to end my life before the appointed time, for I am God's creature. Of course I think about death, but it's about that which will lead me to the Summit.

A Sister, aged 92 years

References for Further Reflection

- **Andriat, Frank**, "Matière et Infini" in *Avec l'intime*, DDB, Paris, 2009, pp. 77-92.
- **Grün, Anselm**, *Vieillir dans la sérénité. Un art de vivre ici et maintenant*, translated from German by Annick Lalucq and Charles Chauvin, Médiaspaul, Paris, 2011.
- **de Hennezel, Marie**, *Nous voulons tous mourir dans la dignité. Un cri de cœur contre la législation*, Robert Laffont/Vesilio, Paris, 2013.



AT THE FRONTIERS OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

It's impossible... I simply can't forget the face of this young Indian woman who just gave birth to a child 'ordered' by a homosexual couple from Eastern Europe. Scarcely emerged from his mother's womb, without having rested for even one second on her stomach, her baby is taken away and handed to the "customers."

This video posted on YouTube compels me to ask: Lord, what do you expect of us consecrated women and men in these times of ethical upheaval?

One thing is certain: the mission entrusted to us and to all Christians by the Lord has been and will remain to proclaim the gospel. Jesus said to the apostles: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." (Jn 20: 21) And since Jesus was sent "to preach the gospel to the poor" in order to "proclaim liberty to captives," (Lc 4: 18) such is our mission as well.

But how to proclaim the "Good News" of the gospel so as to reach this young Indian woman or this East European couple?

The New Avenues of Contemporary Ethics

Let's consider for a moment the stakes of the new avenues opened by contemporary ethics. The trivialization of artificial contraception and abortion, homosexual "marriage," unrestricted medically assisted procreation, gestational surrogacy, gender specific education and euthanasia, all have a common dynamic: through science and new civil laws, we are now able to rid ourselves of many constraints specific to human nature: we become the masters of life and, for the majority of Westerners, this is "good news."



The desire for omnipotence, inherent to the hearts of women and men, has found in this an unfurling of vast proportions. But where do these new avenues actually lead us? To a renewed and liberated humanity, radiant with hope and joy? Will this ethical shaking up lead to true justice and peace? What consequences can we expect from this wave controlled by omnipotent humans? Isn't this a runaway train? Is this behaviour in compliance with "the love of the Father?" (1 Jn 2:15)

The questioning here is colossal, it's destabilizing. It can lead to panic. Or else, opting for a form of "ethics devoid of goodness," it can only lead to judgement, exclusion and condemnation. And we forget that such omnipotence already inhabits our own hearts...

A Proactive Conduct

To the contrary, Pope Francis invites us to “fight the temptation simply to react to complex problems as they arise today,” and to create a “proactive mindset.” (CELAM Episcopal meeting, July 28th, 2013)

It's a matter of sitting at the table with this young Indian woman and this Eastern European couple, of loving them, and of breaking the extraordinary news to them! The child she has carried, the child they are raising... is, just as themselves, a child of God, loved and chosen from eternity. For him and for them, Jesus entered into the realm of death so the gates of heaven may be opened to them. And in response to their trading in life, to their takeover of our nature originally designed by God, all of which wounds His heart, the Father responds by offering the free gift of his pardon.

Our love for the Father, just like theirs, is so inadequate... yet the Father will never tire of loving us. This sense of almightiness is our ruin. Yet the Father's love restores and leads us into his divine joy.

A New Ecology of the Human Being

Let us go further. The death and resurrection of Jesus have revealed the incalculable value of all human life, including the awaiting life in countless supernumerary embryos. In light of the paschal mystery, sexuality appears as a sign engraved in our very flesh of our calling to communion, a calling henceforth within reach of our hearts. As for marriage, it becomes a sacrament that makes visible the eternal love of Christ the Bridegroom for our humanity.

Life, sex and marriage, in their great fragility and vulnerability, can be immersed in God's Love. It is thus that a new ecology of the human being can be developed.

An ecology utterly respectful of life, of sex and of marriage, always viewed in the light of God's tender love.

An ecology that concerns itself with the well-being of the human family with its well-being on earth as well as its ultimate well-being: eternal life and the resurrection of the flesh.

An ecology whose priority is to care for the most vulnerable among us, in keeping with the teachings of the beatitudes.

A human ecology that does not reject science, much to the contrary. Yet a human ecology that does not allow itself to be dominated by science nor by technology.

Servants and Witnesses

So what about us, consecrated women and men? Could we not become the servants and witnesses of this new human ecology?

Do our vows not take on a new relevance? Because they connect us to Jesus, the only human being free of any desire for power. Because our vows lead us to become poor before life, chaste before others, and obedient before God. Because they transform us into witnesses of hope for the eternal wedding feast. Because they lead us on the path of true joy.

So many consecrated women and men already care for the most vulnerable... An example comes to mind, that of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Belgium who protected a senior woman against euthanasia chosen by her family and against her will. Another example: that of the Misericordia Sisters who care for single mothers, notably in Montreal. And that of the Sisters of Life in New York who accompany women confronted by abortion.

And what about you? To whom are you being sent? For whom will you care? Whom will you love? For whom will you pray? How will you express the beauty of this human ecology?

Tomorrow, through you and through us all, will the tender love of the Father who cares about our humanity be truly visible?

F. Antoine-Emmanuel, FMJ
frjerusalem.montreal@yahoo.ca



The Beatitudes of Human Ecology

*Blessed are those who respect,
love and sow life,
they shall be eternally jubilant.*

*Blessed are the most disabled,
the most vulnerable and the most elderly,
the love of God rushes into them.*

*Blessed are those who love that which
the Creator has inscribed in our human
nature, for they are open to eternal love.*

*Blessed are those who embrace their
sexuality, acknowledge it as a God-given
gift, for they will be called sowers of peace.*

*Blessed are those who fight to live
their sexuality through the free offering
of their life, their sexual life in heaven
will be glorified.*

*Blessed are those wounded in their
sexuality, they will be consoled and will
shine on their eternal wedding day.*

*Blessed are those who thirst for conjugal
fidelity and blessed are family builders,
the Kingdom of heaven shines within them.*

*Blessed are those wounded
through marriage and family,
Blessed are those who console them,
they will be sated through divine
communion.*

F. Antoine-Emmanuel, *FMJ*
frjerusalem.montreal@yahoo.ca

