

Receiving... Passing it on...

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At the summit of our Christian experience is the Eucharist that Paul spoke of to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 11:23: "For I have received from the Lord what I also handed on to you." *Receiving... passing it on...* it is something that is said about our lives, it is said about our cultures, it is said about our education, it is said about material treasures, yes—but it is also said about immaterial riches.

Leaving One's Trace

I cannot refer to the reception-transmission binomial without remembering at our convent Chōfu in Japan, 35 years ago, when I met a well-known theologian of the Reformed Church who had published a book on the theology of the suffering of God, a book that had greatly impressed me.

At the time, Professor Kazoh Kitamori confided to me that, during the war years when the book was published, certain colleagues and friends had made the following suggestion to him, since they found his work important. "Let's bury 50 copies of your book in the mountains of Japan. If the worst happens to our country, maybe someday, someone will find one of these copies. The need will be great at that time to have access to this kind of thought." So his colleagues and friends were basically recommending that Kitamori leave his trace. I often find myself advising people to do the same: to leave a trace of their passage, particularly in a time of transition like the one we are currently living in.

Not Without Suffering

I think of our sister, Jeanne Bossé, who, at the age of 96 and 97, agreed to be interviewed (twice) about her life on Japanese soil by one of the women whom she had long catechized. She told me: "I am happy with these two books,¹ it will allow me to extend my mission beyond the grave." Basically, any educational mission extends well beyond the earthly life of the educator.

Jeanne Bossé was happy to offer her testimony to her beloved Japan, but she told me that this adventure also brought her the greatest suffering of her life. That was because the author and editor of the second book, for marketing reasons, refused to allow the name of Jesus to appear in the book. "But, as Jeanne never stopped saying, it was for Jesus Christ that I came and lived more than 50 years of my life here!" At the end of a sleepless night, she wrote out the text that she wanted to be included and they finally agreed to put it in an appendix. Yes, leaving one's trace can require trials and sufferings...

Why Remain Silent?

This year we are celebrating the 375th anniversary of the founding of the city of Montreal, which was first called Ville-Marie. How much determination is needed to ensure that the origins of this establishment are not ignored!

¹ English translation of the titles of the two books published in Japanese: *Smile Brings Happiness* published at the age of 96. *Happiness Comes after Tears*, published at the age of 97.

The man who dreamed Montreal, Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière, and those who supported him in this extravagant project, the Maisonneuves, the Jeanne Mances, the Marguerite Bourgeoys, wanted to “celebrate the praises of God in a desert where the name of Jesus Christ has never been uttered.” They believed that French and Native Americans could together constitute a Christian community in the image depicted in the Acts of the Apostles. Does the undeniable mystical dimension of the beginnings of Montreal prevent proclaiming who the pioneers actually were? Is the same kind of marketing that silenced Jeanne Bossé playing out here as well?

Do Not Wait

People, families, communities and institutions are experiencing major anthropological and cultural changes in the immense social upheaval that we are currently undergoing.

How do we work today to ensure that the fundamental values and the meaning of life that have marked the lives of so many generations are not lost?

We must not wait for a time when we are already in the process of entrusting to outside persons such things as educational institutions, health centres, social projects, or cultural initiatives before we begin planning the transfer of the spirit (charism) of the work, the transfer of the means to ensure the growth and adaptation of “such and such” a service. Our baptismal vigilance obliges us to start right away, either by making wise decisions or by giving our help and support to those responsible for making those choices.

Questions in Search of Answers

Some people will recall a meeting in Montreal in October 2016 when the question for consideration was: Who will announce Jesus Christ in our corner of the world in 2025? It begs the question: Can we contribute in any way so that a distribution of the generous gifts from religious institutes will better ensure faith-education services in a future that is no longer so distant?

What importance do we give to intergenerational encounters within our respective institutes? What importance do we give to intergenerational encounters between or among different institutes? Such meetings are not without importance in terms of how to pass things on.

What interest and what support will we bring to initiatives enabling charisms to flourish in the worlds of education, health and welfare; institutions that will continue to humanize and spiritualize humanity in other ways? Do we encourage life stories not just within our ranks, but in families and in movements that have helped to humanize our environments?

Are we being attentive when young people point out to us that large sections of faith-inspired commitments in our societies are threatened with being totally eclipsed? I have in mind the concern of a Catherine Foisy, whose goal is to ensure that the immense contribution that Canadians make to foreign missions, on all continents, will continue to inspire tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and so on. What kind of care are we taking of our material and immaterial archives? What concerns do we have to protect artistic treasures? And finally what initiatives do we take to give our members and to our

communities a little “extra” in life? These questions apply to today, of course, but they also can be applied to the future.

Two Final Remarks:

- Behind Montreal’s founding is the mission of the Jesuits and their marvelous initiative of writing up an annual report on their engagements in the New World for a number of years. *The Jesuit Relations* played a major role in stimulating the missionary consciousness of 17th-century France: they truly assumed their responsibility for transmission, for passing on the news. Without the annual reports of the Jesuits, who would have dared the adventure of 1641–1642?

- For the Year of Consecrated Life, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life have offered us a circular letter entitled *Keep Watch! Journeying in the footsteps of God*.² I come back to the two icons highlighted in this Letter: the cloud of the Exodus (Exodus 40:36-38) and that of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 2). The Word of God passed on across the centuries is the Word of God that I receive today and that I will not tire of passing on to others. And the cloud in the desert... it’s as small as a man’s hand and it continues to teach us to live.

² Published on September 23, 2014.