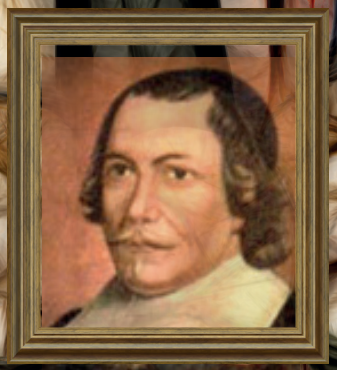
ad vitam

THE WEBZINE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN CANADA

Charism and Prophetism

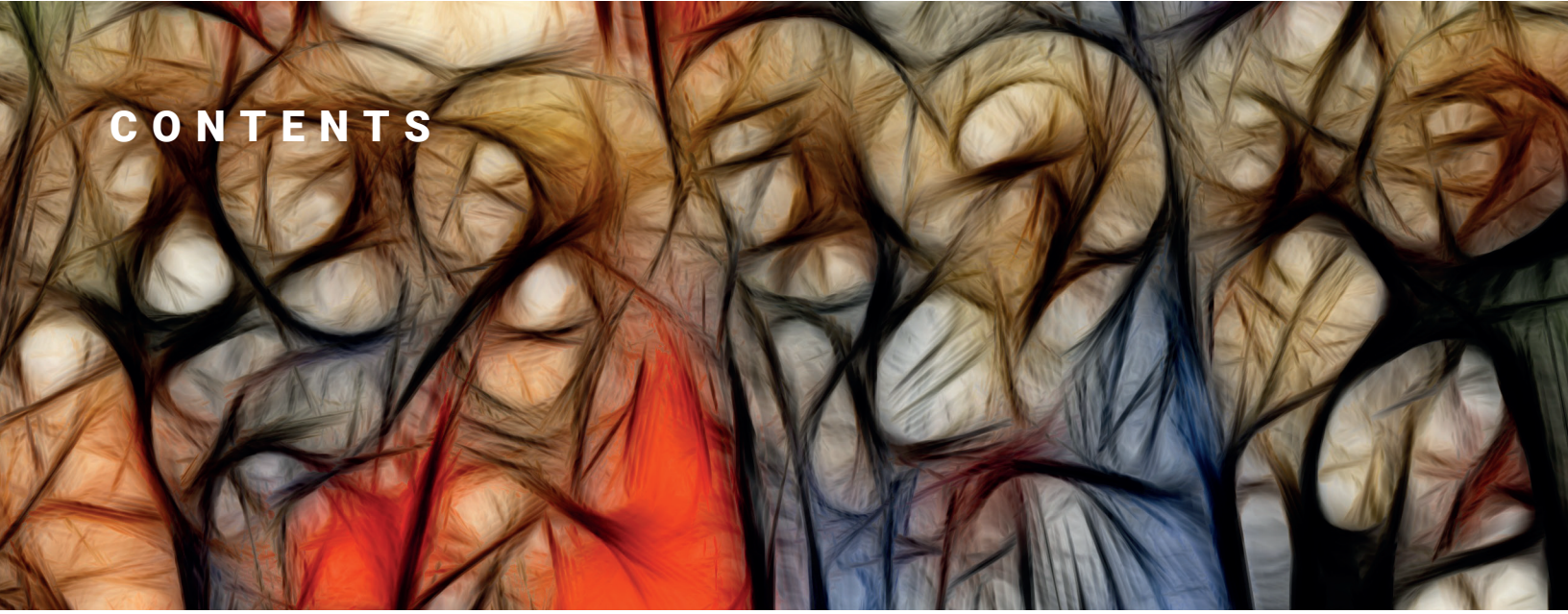




CANADIAN RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE

SUMMER2022



CONTENTS

Returning to the sources

5 **Charism at the Foundation of Consecrated Life and of Our Institutes**

9 **The Notion of Prophetism in an Evolving Consecrated Life**

13 **Vulnerability and Availability to the Holy Spirit**

Sounding out hearts

17 **Echoes from the forums**

Reacting to reality

19 **Does Our Charism Nourish Our Hope ?**

21 **Prophetism "in evolution"**

22 **When Vulnerability Opens a Future**

24 **Discernment – Tending the Gifts of Charism and Prophetism**

25 **Charism and Prophetism: emerging questions**

Preparing the future

27 **A Charism received for Missioning Towards Others**

32 **Future reflections**

The fragility that changes us

Sabrina Di Matteo, Executive Assistant - Mission, Canadian Religious Conference

This issue of *ad vitam* is the culmination of a long journey. These pages are not simply the result of articles requested on a given theme, but they are witness to a journey that has mobilized our network since the beginning of the pandemic. Like so many institutions and sectors, CRC members have had to learn new ways of collaborating and coming together. And it has been transformative!

Due to the pandemic, the leadership teams of congregations and religious institutes in Canada met by videoconferencing several times a year. Opportunities for formation and discussion became nation-wide, instead of being confined to a city or a region. Interpretation services during webinars allowed for sharing beyond the language barrier.

The experience of coming together virtually birthed new solidarities, and the process of the 2021 General Assembly (entirely online) consolidated the desire that the Religious Conference renew its core mission to "animate" this large family of consecrated persons in Canada, walking in communion, and enriched by its diversity from coast to coast. *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it*? (Is 43:19) This verse from Isaiah carried us through the pandemic: in this transition between a former world and an uncertain future, our trust is in God. God is already creating newness: but do we see it?

The pandemic destabilized us, and made us aware, more than ever, of the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. The issues of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples invite us to rewrite the history of our country and of the mission of evangelization and its dark side. In this context, the CRC went back to basics to revisit the meaning of the charism that founds consecrated life, and the prophetic character that emerges from it. This journey, rooted in the 2021 General Assembly, took place over the course of 2021 and 2022. This edition of ad vitam recounts this back-and-forth process in four phases, between the panelists of the Theological Commission (*Returning to sources*), the CRC network's discussion forums (*Sounding out hearts*), and the reviewing and future perspectives of the Canadian situation (*Reacting to reality* and *Preparing the future*).

This process is not akin to navel-gazing, but is rather about taking stock in a period of fraglity that is truly opening paths of reflection and questioning, thereby allowing us to welcome transformation and newness, which depend on God, on our responsiveness, and our discernment. Go forth!

OUR COLLABORATORS



Sister Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS, has a doctorate in theology. She is involved in the formation of her community and works with institutes of consecrated life and various groups and associations. She was a member of the Theological Commission from 2010 to 2019 and has accepted a new mandate in 2022.



Sister Nathalie Roberge, OP, is a member of the Congregation of Dominican Missionary Sisters Adorers in Quebec City, QC. She has a doctorate in spiritual theology and is a lecturer-formator and retreat leader. She is a member of the CRC Theological Commission since 2018.



Father Michel Proulx, O.PRAEM, has been a member of the Order of Canons Regular of Premonstratensians since 1982 and Prior of the monastery of St. Constant in Quebec since 2008. He has a doctorate in theology and is currently responsible for biblical animation in the diocese of Saint-Jean-Longueuil. He has been a member and co-chair of the CRC's Theological Commission.



Daniel Cadrin, OP, is a native of Lévis (QC). He entered the Dominican Order in 1967 and has been a deacon since 1975. A retired professor (Dominican Pastoral Institute), he is also a member of the Provincial Council and lives in Montreal in the community of St-Albert-le-Grand. He has been a member of the Theological Commission since 2022.



Sister Lorraine D'Entremont, SC, is a Sister of Charity (Halifax). She lives and works at Seton Spirituality Centre in Terence Bay, NS. She has a Master of Divinity degree and a Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction. She has served as a member and co-chair of the Theological Commission, and is now a guest member.



Gilles Routhier is a priest and full professor at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Sciences of Laval University in Quebec City. He specializes in the fields of ecclesiology, missiology and catechesis in the development of contemporary Catholicism (especially in Quebec).



Charism the Foundation of Consecrated Life and of Our Institutes

Sr. Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS *

When we consider the subject of the evolution of consecrated life, the question of charism necessarily arises. Since Vatican II, the advancement of theological thought has enriched the understanding of this gift of God given to the Church and to our institutes. However, in real-life experience, some points of confusion and question marks may remain. It is from that perspective that we shall look at three questions that concern us more directly. Where are we in our understanding of the charism that is at the foundation of consecrated life and of our institutes? What do we retain from its spiritual and institutional dimensions? What is our responsibility towards the charism of our institute?

The word « charism »

From the outset, it must be admitted that the concept of charism has encountered resistance. Even though the charismatic reality is not new in the Church, since it was already found in apostolic times, the term "charism"—specific to Pauline vocabulary—has aroused confusion and suspicion in the history of the Church. The limitation of this term to extraordinary gifts or those attributed to an hierarchical elite has resulted in a loss of unity and of

*Presentation made on September 21, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

the biblical richness of charisms.[1] With Vatican II, charism was re-situated in connection with ministries and *Lumen Gentium* 12 recognizes its place and role in the life of the Church.[2] Regarding consecrated life, the Church draws its outlines (*LG* 43–44) without, however, using the expression "charism."

It was after the Council, in *Evangelica Testificatio*, in 1971, that Paul VI clearly interpreted the conciliar intentions and declared the charismatic character of religious life. He uses the notion of charism in dealing with various vocations and he speaks of the charism of the founders at the origin of the institute. He specifies that the charism of religious life is a gift of the Holy Spirit, intimately united to the mystery of the Church and forming an integral part of her life (*ET* 11).

John Paul II, particularly in *Vita Consecrata*, deploys the multifaceted charismatic dimension of consecrated life under the leadership of the Spirit for the building of the Church and in service to the people of God.[3] He identifies the charisms of consecrated life and the particular charism of each religious family.[4] He underlines its collective dimension and returns to the

A project of evangelical life in following Christ through its components: spirituality, mission, and fraternal life

aspect of the charism as a vocation and its belonging to the community of the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ.

Benedict XVI speaks of the richness of the charisms of consecrated life in connection with the Word of God: they can be read as a living Gospel implemented in ever-new forms.[5] He insists on the gift of discernment and the accompaniment of pastors, in welcoming what the Spirit says to the Churches through these charisms.

Pope Francis, for his part, emphasizes the incarnation and actualization of the charism in history, in the different places, times and situations in the life of the institutes. He asks to keep the founding charism alive: to keep it moving, growing and in dialogue with what the Spirit is telling us today about our time. Which presupposes discernment and prayer.[6]

Since then, understanding of the charism — especially with respect to its components as well as with the evangelical counsels — has continued to deepen at the heart of a Church-communion-mission.

Charism at the Foundation of Consacrated Life and of the Various Institutes[7]

Vatican II called on the existing institutes for an appropriate renewal, which made them enter into a process of returning to their roots and to the spirit of the founders. They defined their charism as a gift of God expressing the experience of the Spirit lived and transmitted by their founders, and intended to be, as mentioned in *Mutuae Relationes* 11, lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ, in a constant process of growth.

This charism of the founders, which is at the basis of the foundation of an institute, relates both to a particular grasp of the mystery of Christ and to an interpretation of the needs of the Church and of the People of God. It is embodied in a charismatic vocation in the service of the Church. Transmitted to disciples, it is based on a spirituality arising from the foundational spiritual experience and is carried out in a given mission and according to a particular way of life.

The charism of the Institute is then revealed as a project of evangelical life in following Christ through its components: spirituality, mission, and fraternal life. These components shape the distinctive face of the institute in which the charism is expressed. They each have their own specificity and cannot be confused with it. The charism cannot be limited to the sole dimension of spirituality, or mission, or works. It is a spiritual reality which marks the members' way

of being and of living and which is embodied through its components. Thus, spiritual life, community life, and apostolic life form an intimately linked whole, the elements of which mutually nurture, reinforce and complement one another at the heart of the charism.

As for the evangelical counsels — which are constitutive of consecrated life — an intimate connection is established between the counsels and the charism. The latter illuminates the practice. It envelops and particularizes the evangelical counsels according to its specificity and it is through its own charism that evangelical radicalism is assumed in each institute.8 By recognizing that the charism is the basis of all consecrated life, the latter can no longer be defined solely by consecration according to the evangelical counsels; it must also identify itself through its charism.9 And again, the holiness of the consecrated person is not based solely on the evangelical counsels, but also on fidelity to the founding charism (cf. *VC* 36).

Spiritual Dimension of the Institue's Charism

Regarding its spiritual dimension, the institute's charism is a visible sign of the presence of the Spirit, of its action, of its richness and of its holiness.[10] It is a manifestation of Trinitarian action and of God's plan for humanity. It is granted to one or more people for the purpose of founding a community in the service of the Church and her mission. It presupposes a vocation, a calling and a choice lived in a form of life and a mission corresponding to the call received in communion with God, the Church and the People of God. This gift of the Spirit perpetuates the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, realized in Jesus and continued in the Church.

In its collective and community dimension, the charism signifies "the communion and unity of the Church in Christ" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 18a). It describes the way of being in community and the exercise of the mission by the members. Thanks to the fraternity enacted in charity and fraternal communion, as well as the testimony of life and of the members' action, the charism makes the apostolate fruitful. It helps to intensify ecclesial communion and fulfills its prophetic function in the Church.[11] In addition, is it not just within the mission of the Church, but also — and even above all — within the proper mission of the Holy Spirit, of which it is constitutive, in continuity with Christ's mission and according to the plan of the Father?[12] Therefore, fidelity to the charism is fidelity to the Holy Spirit, to the particular call of Christ, and in constant adjustment to the plan and the will of God.[13]

The institute's charism is a visible sign of the presence of the Spirit, of its action, of its richness and of its holiness

Institutional; Dimension of the Charism of Institutes of Consecrated Life

The charism's spiritual dimension calls out for its institutional dimension.[14] Sign and instrument of the Spirit, the charism is a gift linked to the call of God and summoning one to an institutional and ecclesial form. Being at the founding of the Institute, the charism takes shape in a way of life and a mission inspired by the spiritual heritage of the founders. The institute then becomes the place for the solidification of the charism in a collective entity, a community and apostolic body.

This collective charism requests to be recognized by the Church as a stable form of living (Canon Law § 573). Its recognition passes through the approval of constitutions, which represent the first institutionalization of the charism. Also, in order for it to serve the Church's apostolic vitality and holiness, while bringing its benefits to every individual and the community, discernment must take place. And that evangelical discernment belongs to the Church, which is responsible for recognizing the specific identity and structure of each institute.

Vita Consecrata 4b also recalls that, through its institutional dimension, the charism is part of the great reality of ecclesial communion in which all gifts converge for the building up of the Body of Christ and the Church's mission. Its institutionalization, understood in its immanent sense, as a dynamism contained in the charism itself, enables it not only to externalize itself but to live while deploying itself in time and space to achieve its own purpose. Its institutionalization allows it to relate to God and to others, and to express itself in order to be able to communicate, to make itself be known in an intelligible way.[15] Thus, in an intimate communion, the two sides of the same mystical and institutional reality*16* of the institute's charism meet.

The Institutes' Responsability for its Charism

Benedict XVI insists: the Gospel and the institution are inseparable.[17] The Gospel takes shape through the charism and materializes in a diaconia. It animates and structures the community that becomes communion school and road of holiness in love and charity. A participant, according to the gift received from the Spirit, in the renewal and development of the Church, the institute carries the responsibility to embody, update and transmit its charism.

The institute is the depository of the charism — not its owner. Because the charism is a good of the Church for the world, for the community and for each and every member. In fidelity to the Spirit and the Church, the institute and its members have to respond to the prophetic call of this gift as a life project and as the word of God constantly revealing itself. They have to keep it alive and active in and by their being, and by acting on a daily basis. Their responsibility, in the face of this gift of the Spirit, made to the founders and approved by the Church, requires that its transmission through formation be especially watched over. Being directly related to the charism, the formation says something about the charism through its procedures. Hence the need to see where the charism's development is, how it is articulated in initial and ongoing formation sessions and to promote its impetus in all dimensions of our consecrated life.

Conclusion

If God calls and sends, it's because he gives first. God's gift to our founders, the charism made of them searchers of God and benefactors of humanity. Next, in fidelity to the spirit and our charism that is experienced in our spiritual, community and apostolic life, and the evangelical counsels, we collaborate on the gift of the giver and his project for humanity.[18] So, the charism at the founding of our institutes, a sign of the action of the Spirit, attests that the Pentecost is still ongoing and that the incarnation of Christ and his mission continues in the Church, under the action of the Spirit and according to the plan of God.

1. Yolanta RZECZEWSKA, *Les charismes dans l'Église et leur institutionnalisation canonique,* Presses de l'Université Grégorienne, 2016.
2. Yolanta RZECZEWSKA, p. 199.
3. Yolanta RZECZEWSKA, p. 242.
4. Ibid., p. 245
5. BENOÎT XVI, 2 février 2008, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/fr/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080202_vita-consacrata.html
6. Pape FRANÇOIS, 17 mai 2021, https://www.vaticannews.va/fr/pape/news/2021-05/pape-francois-vie-consacree-charisme.html
7. Nicolas de BOCCARD, *Charisme et instituts de vie consacrée*, 2015.
8. Fernande VIENS, *Charismes et vie consacrée*, p. 272-273
9. Nicolas de BOCCARD, p. 91.
10. Benoît XVI, 3 juin 2006, dans Yolanta RZECZEWSKA, p. 305.
11. Yolanta RZECZEWSKA, p. 162.
12. Ibid., p. 185.
13. Ibid., p. 191.
14. Ibid., p. 315. Benoît XVI mentionne les deux dimensions charismatiques et institutionnelles coessentielles à la constitution divine du Peuple de Dieu, rendent présents le mystère et l'œuvre du salut du Christ dans le monde.
15. Ibid., p. 434.
16. Ibid., p. 427.
17. Ibid., p. 314.
18. Ibid., p. 451.

The Notion of **Prophetism** in an Evolving Consecrated Life

Daniel Cadrin, OP *

Today's calls

Prophetism is a dimension of our consecrated life that sometimes arouses reactions, which is even its role. We are exploring this notion especially because it emerged from the spring General Assembly as one of the CRC's three priorities: *To be a prophetic voice of consecrated life*. But also, during the Year of Consecrated Life in 2015, in his *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People*, Pope Francis wrote: I *am counting on you "to wake up the world", since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy*. He called upon us to interpret events, to create signs of fraternity, with freedom and without being discouraged.

To help us move forward on this prophetic path, here are some things to think about: the link to the context, the various forms of prophetism, current issues and avenues to explore.

Context and History

Acts 2:18: *Even on the slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy*.

When we look at and hear the prophets in the Scriptures, certain traits stand out that remain relevant.

The interventions of the prophets are closely linked to what is happening in their environment, in the social, political, economic, but also the religious and cultural world. Prophetism is not in the clouds but is set in a moving history, with its forces of death and new life. It is very embodied, attentive to what dies and to what is born, to what kills and what resuscitates, to what is injured and can be reborn. This invites us to pay attention to what is happening today in our societies, in the Church, in consecrated life and in all creation.

The prophets denounce the forces of death, the idols, and call out, in the name of the living God, for justice, for concern for the weak (at the time the widow, the orphan, and the stranger). The two are intrinsically connected: faith in the living God and justice and peace; idolatry and oppression. But the prophetic character, which is very much tied to the present, is not locked up in it. It takes place over a long period of time: it is rooted in a memory, it assumes an historical heritage; and it opens up a future, based on promise. In this way, a hope is offered which revives and calls for commitment to neighbour and to God. This invites us to ask ourselves, among other things, what is our own heritage, in our religious communities, as witnesses of prophetism.

Finally, the prophets arouse reactions, they do not leave people indifferent, neither the

*Presentation made on September 21, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.



powerful nor the ordinary people. They meet with both support and opposition. One cannot be prophetic and be content to conform to the present, hesitating to go against the grain or to innovate. But how far can one go in dissonance and dissent with the values of our society?

Various Forms of Prophetism

Luke 24:19: *Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people*.

What is prophetic? One thinks spontaneously — and that is reflected in the General Assembly's reflections — of actions for justice in society. And in point of fact, they are indeed prophetic. But in doing that, there is a risk of narrowing the prophetic field to what has very much characterized consecrated life and has perhaps defined it too much: works. The project of consecrated life and its prophetic nature are broader. All the more so, as the statistics presented to the GA on consecrated life in Canada indicated, the average age there is high (that's an understatement!). The capacities of people and institutions are not what they used to be. That does not detract from the fact that older members of consecrated life can lead an equally evangelical life; but not like before. So let's broaden the field of forms of prophetism.

First, who can be prophetic? Individuals, of course, but also communities, networks, organizations, coalitions, which we can participate in without necessarily being their creators and leaders. And how? Through actions and words, of course, but also through gestures, projects, witnesses, lifestyles, vows (a whole field to work on), meditations, writings, social media, etc.

We should not forget that what is prophetic in one time and one place is not necessarily prophetic in another time and another place. In Quebec and other regions of the world, in previous centuries, communities of women religious established, managed and directed educational, health and social service institutions. These women, by what they were and did, offered a prophetic sign, opened up new paths. Nowadays, you don't have to be a religious to do that. Or, an example from my own community, the Order of Preachers, is that we set up university faculties (psychology, social

sciences, etc.) that trained people and opened up the future. They don't need us for that now. So, what would be prophetic in the here and now?

Current Issues

Jer 22:3: *Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place*.

I would like to point out some current issues that may require the prophetism of consecrated life, in various ways. You can add other issues that affect you. And since we cannot be everywhere (leave that to God!), some issues may challenge us more than others.

- **Climate change**: This issue is a priority because what is at stake is the future of creation itself in all its diversity. Here, our prophetic character can be expressed in our ways of life and in multiple solidarities, which bring together the generations.

- **Migrants and interculturality**: We have been involved with this question for a long time and we have even acquired unique expertise, because of the composition of our communities and of our presence in so many countries, with their religions and cultures. By living an intercultural fraternity, we can offer a very concrete and challenging sign; and by supporting projects affecting refugees, seasonal workers, migrants caught in our complicated system.

- **Violence and victims**: Violence affects families, couples, Indigenous Peoples, racialized groups, religious minorities, etc.; it makes neighbourhood life insecure. We can get involved through educational processes that teach young people to live together differently, through justice and reparation organizations, attempts at dialogue, or simply through friendships with people on the margins and without support.

- **Belongings and identities**: Our society is increasingly fragmented into networks of belonging that either confront one another or do not meet. Identities are given there through very specific characteristics (gender, culture, education, neighbourhood, age, religion, politics, music, etc.) and common features become secondary. How to build up living together in-this splintering with its polarizations and intolerances? I am not sure, but it is an issue that we will have to face with caution and daring.

- **Aging and care**: The pandemic has highlighted how vulnerable and easily abandoned the elderly are. In this area, we have dual expertise: one is, of course, we are rather old ourselves, but we have also set up care and community centres in which the elderly are considered as people to whom we pay respect and attention until the end of their days. We have a unique testimony to make better known.

- **Governance and civic life**: The common good is promoted and implemented by styles of governance and institutional functioning. When we make our profession, we commit ourselves to participate in an interdependent community life in co-responsibility. We would do well to better explore this dimension of our life which can be a prophetic sign in today's world and in the Church.

- **Secularity and transcendence**: We live in a world in which traces and signs of transcendence are erased, arouse mistrust, or become bizarre. How to open a future in such a perspective of radical finitude of human existence? Here, our testimony through prayer and hope in the Hereafter can beckon and awaken the world.

- **Material and spiritual heritage**: Part of this heritage comes from religious communities. These little-known treasures can serve as mediations to open people up to a broader sense of time, to break u[the prison of the present in which so many people are locked up, or to awaken people to a spiritual quest. Not to mention

the treasure of the spiritual heritage as such that we carry, in our fragile vessels, and which is so inspiring. (See for example the "Religious Heritage Days" held annually in Quebec on September 11–12.)

Avenues to Explore

1 Cor 14:3: *Someone who prophesies speaks to other people, building them up and giving them encouragement and reassurance*.

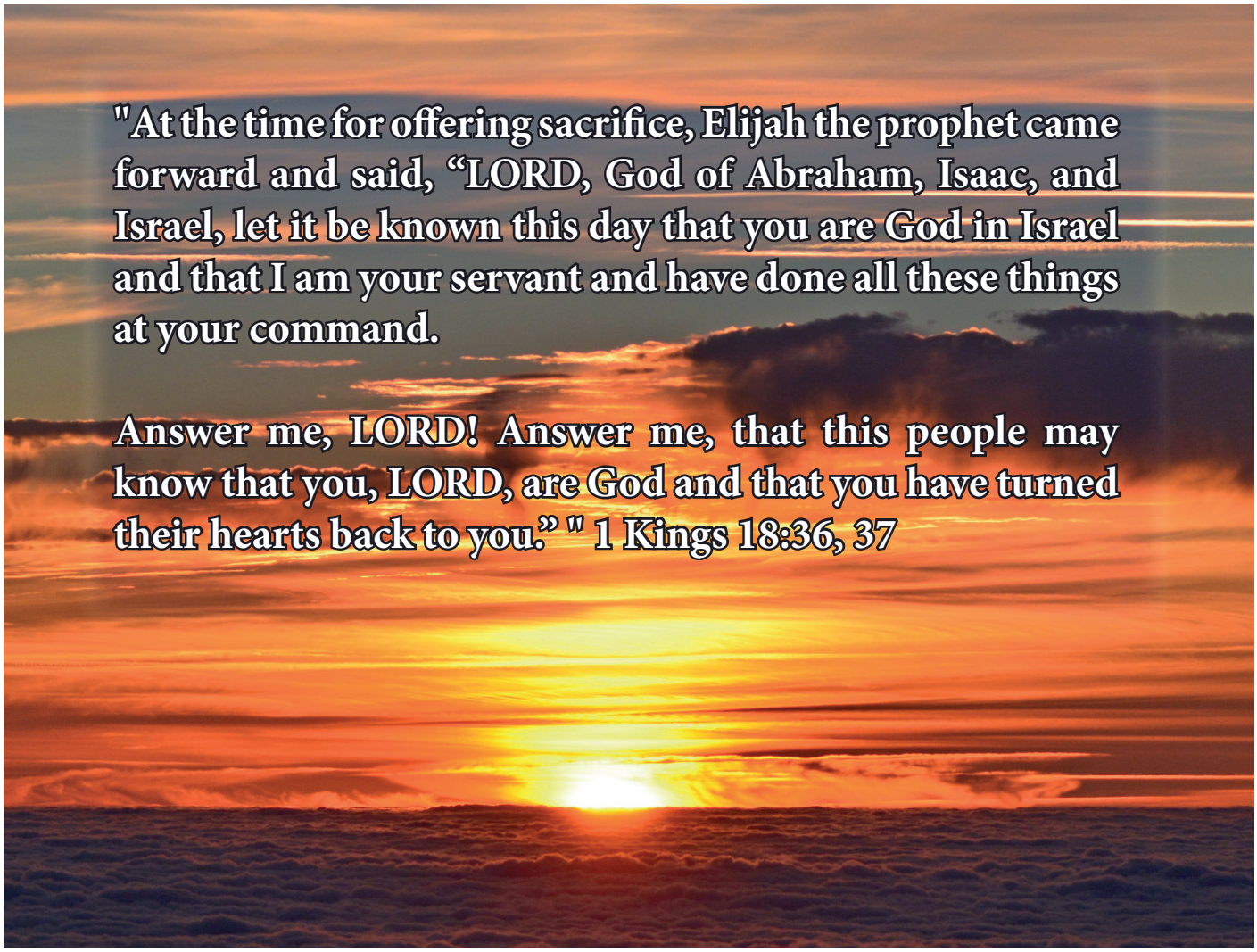
In the first Christian communities, there were prophets. Men and women could prophesy. Paul indicates three roles of the prophets, which seem very significant to me:

- Building, edifying, the opposite of destroying: building up the community, the body of Christ, building up oneself and others: What could we build today and with whom?

- Exhorting, making appeals, the opposite of dodging or shirking: Who could we challenge and on what issues? What intervention methods should be favoured?

- Encouraging, comforting, the opposite of discouraging: whose courage could we raise and in what ways?

We have our work cut out for us, in the form of bread to break and to share.





Vulnerability and Availability to the Holy Spirit

Sr. Nathalie Roberge , OP *

My reflection aims to delve more deeply into two elements that emerged from the CRC's General Assembly of 2021: the observation of the vulnerability of our communities and the awareness that it is more important than ever to be available to the Holy Spirit.

These two realities were expressed in different ways during the General Assembly. I recall one sentence in particular, taken from the compilation of interventions of May 27, 2021, which to my mind sums up rather well the gist of your remarks on the subject: "Our vulnerabilities are touchstones to better advance in and with the Spirit." The expression is magnificent. It is the bearer of a vitality of life. In just a few words, you managed to translate both your lucidity in the face of reality and the profound hope that dwells within you. It seems to me that it is prophetic to have had the courage to name the situation of vulnerability that we are currently living through and, in the same breath, to have put this situation in dialogue with a call to be open to the Holy Spirit, who is still at work today. I would like to unwrap this intuition with you, while setting up a major question as a backdrop: How can our vulnerability enable us to be prophetic witnesses of Christ, guided by the breath of the Spirit?

*Presentation made on September 21, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

The Bright Side of Vulnerability

At first glance, it is not easy to assert that our vulnerabilities are life-giving. Usually, what we experience first and foremost is the negative dimension of vulnerability. To be vulnerable means to be in a situation of weakness or fragility, which predisposes us to be affected, to experience a lack or a certain dependence. It is not at first reassuring, nor even fulfilling. Moreover, in the history of religious life, consecrated persons have felt called upon to be close to people who are living in a situation of vulnerability in order to come to their aid. These situations have been — and remain — a call to put on service wear and to get to work.

However, in the interventions of the General Assembly, we witness a reversal of perspective. The focus is primarily on the bright side of vulnerability. We are invited, as communities, "to welcome our vulnerability as a grace" (compilation of May 28, 2021). This is particularly challenging! What emerges from that statement is the need to have a faith-filled outlook on our vulnerabilities, not to wallow in them, but to make them stepping stones into the future. To my knowledge, this is a subject that has not been looked at much in recent decades and deserves our attention. Basically, it matches the meaning of our vows as consecrated persons. The vows of poverty, chastity and obedience that we took were specifically intended to deepen in us the awareness of our vulnerability, to lead us to entrust ourselves to God and to live, with Him, the reality of our daily life.

We therefore see the appearance of one of the main characteristics of the bright side of vulnerability, which is to open ourselves up to God, to make us attentive to His movement in our lives, and available to the work of His Spirit. On this subject, Pope Francis said on June 7: "Fragilities must not be left off to one side: they are a theological place. My fragility, that of each of us, is the theological place of encounter with the Lord." (June 7, 2021)

Other positive characteristics of vulnerability can also be highlighted. Besides the interior disposition to listen to the Holy Spirit, the awareness of our vulnerability disposes us to see the manifestations of Divine Providence and, therefore, to live in an attitude of gratitude. Moreover, the experience of our vulnerability also becomes an opportunity to open ourselves up to others, to establish relationships, to create solidarity. Moreover, it is conducive to stimulating our creativity. It pushes us to go beyond our usual frameworks, to broaden our horizons, to explore new paths. In short, these are some aspects that invite us to welcome our vulnerability "like a grace."

Obviously, this welcoming process involves taking a step back from events. The work of the Spirit within us usually takes place over a period of time. It is interwoven with our process of trial and error, our hesitations, our resistance and even our mistakes. We know this from experience!

Vulnerability in the History of Salvation and in the History of Our Communities

It would be interesting to go through the history of salvation together to see how God reveals Himself through situations of vulnerability. Think in particular of Abraham who is without descendants, of Joseph sold by his brothers, of Moses who must flee from Egypt, of Zechariah and of Elizabeth who are sterile, etc. There are many examples. But from one end of the Revelation story to the other, a common thread emerges. God makes a promise to these vulnerable men and women, a promise repeated like a refrain: "I will be with you." This is the only certainty that God gives to those He invites to walk with Him. Paul echoes this in the second letter to the Corinthians: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor 12:9).

If we had more time, it would also be worthwhile to revisit the history of our communities. It seems to me that it is possible to say, without being mistaken, that our communities were born in vulnerability. It would

be enough to reread the archival documents — chronicles, letters, etc. — to be sure of this. In general, our founders had few means at their disposal. But they accepted to let God open the way for them. It is through their availability to the Holy Spirit, in the soil of their vulnerability, that the charism of our institutes took shape. It produced wonderful fruits of holiness and works, which continue to stand the test of time.

I am thinking, in particular, about all those communities that came to settle in Canada at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, because of a climate of persecution in France. In the short term, it was an incomprehensible ordeal. But in the long term, we can see all the fertility that resulted for our country — especially in terms of education. These men and women risked everything but bounced back from the ordeal and reinvented themselves, relying on the grace of God. What about us, today?

As Pope Francis recalled on May 17, 2021: Consecrated life is always a "dialogue with reality." Hence the invitation he extends to us: "Do not fear limits! Do not be afraid of frontiers! Do not fear the peripheries! For it is there that the Spirit will speak to you. Put yourselves 'within range' of the Holy Spirit."[1]

The Vulnerability of the Church and Our Communities Today

Currently, many of us are probably living with the feeling of being helpless and overwhelmed in the face of community and ecclesial realities, to the point, perhaps, of believing ourselves to be useless or — even worse — insignificant. The crisis situation that has been affecting us for so many months — due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sexual abuse scandals, discoveries at residential schools for Indigenous children, etc. — is causing us to live a time of stripping-down, but also a time of maturation and refocusing on what is essential.

One of the observations that emerge from this troubled period is certainly the awareness that the Church — and each of our communities — is immersed in the Paschal Mystery. Not only does the Church live from the Paschal Mystery, but she is living the Paschal Mystery in her own flesh! The words of Mary of the Incarnation take on their full meaning in our context: "We taste the fruits of the cross without leaving the cross." (Letter XCIII, p. 265)2

What are the calls of the Spirit that arise from this frequentation of the Paschal Mystery? We can undoubtedly give different answers depending on the charisms of our institutes and our personal charisms. To support our process of discernment, I suggest that we contemplate, for the space of a few lines, the event of the Last Supper.

The Vulnerability of Christ

Christ himself experienced vulnerability, extreme despoilment. This experience culminates in the cross, which violently seals his death. From a human perspective, the life of Christ ends in failure. To glimpse the bright side of the scandal of the cross, it is imperative to return to the incredible gesture that Christ poses on the evening of the Last Supper.

As he feels his life is coming to an end, Christ uses all his creativity to accomplish his mission. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he takes bread and wine, presents them to the Father, gives him thanks and entrusts himself entirely to him, in faith. At the same time, he offers his life for the salvation of the multitude, making every human being a brother and a sister, whom he wishes to unite in one body. At the heart of his vulnerability, Christ shatters the boundaries of space and time to go to all the way to the end of love — a going-all-the-way to the end that reaches us today, in our reality. This is what is actualized with each Eucharist.

How can Christ's attitude at the Last Supper inspire us today? At the heart of our vulnerabilities, we have the opportunity to relive the gesture of Christ. With Christ, we can risk trusting in the Father with confidence. With Christ, by the breath of the Spirit, we can dare to open ourselves to all those around us, to the point of developing a "culture of encounter" (Fratelli Tutti, no. 30). With Christ, we can beg the Spirit to make us creative in how to break the bread of our daily lives, to bring life to the world.

In short, the intuition that you had at the General Assembly to consider "our vulnerabilities [as] touchstones to better advance in and with the Spirit" is consistent with Christ's prophetic gesture at the Last Supper. Your intuition expresses the desire to provide a concrete response to Christ's request: "Do this in remembrance of me…". So one could say that "our vulnerabilities are touchstones to better advance in and with the Spirit" in memory of Him.

Paragraph 285 of the *Aparecida* document takes on a new radiance from this perspective: "Thus life in the Spirit does not enclose us in cozy intimacy, but makes us generous and creative persons, happy in proclamation and missionary service. We become committed to the demands of reality and able to find a profound significance for everything that we are entrusted with doing for the Church and for the world." (*Aparecida*, 285).

Conclusion

It is fortunate that we can help each other in reading the signs of the times and living ever more closely under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The experience of the synodal conversations that we have been having for more than a year now has been, in that sense, a support on the path of our following of Christ.

Certainly, the current reality clearly reminds us that, as consecrated persons — and more fundamentally as human beings — we are incomplete (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no 302). We are part of the Creation that groans in childbirth (Rom 8:22). However, the awareness of our vulnerability allows us to increasingly open ourselves up to the gift of God. Our awareness disposes us to welcome the Holy Spirit in our "earthenware vessels" (2 Cor 4:7).

As Pope Francis invites us in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, "may the Holy Spirit cause us to contemplate history in the light of the risen Jesus. In this way, the Church will not stand still, but constantly welcome the Lord's surprises." (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 139).

Together, with hearts open to "the Lord's surprises," may we call on the Creator Spirit, the Comforter Spirit, the Spirit who gives light and strength, to move forward with confidence. For, as Pope Francis says, "The Holy Spirit is the rebuilder of hope." (Pope Francis, June 16, 2019)

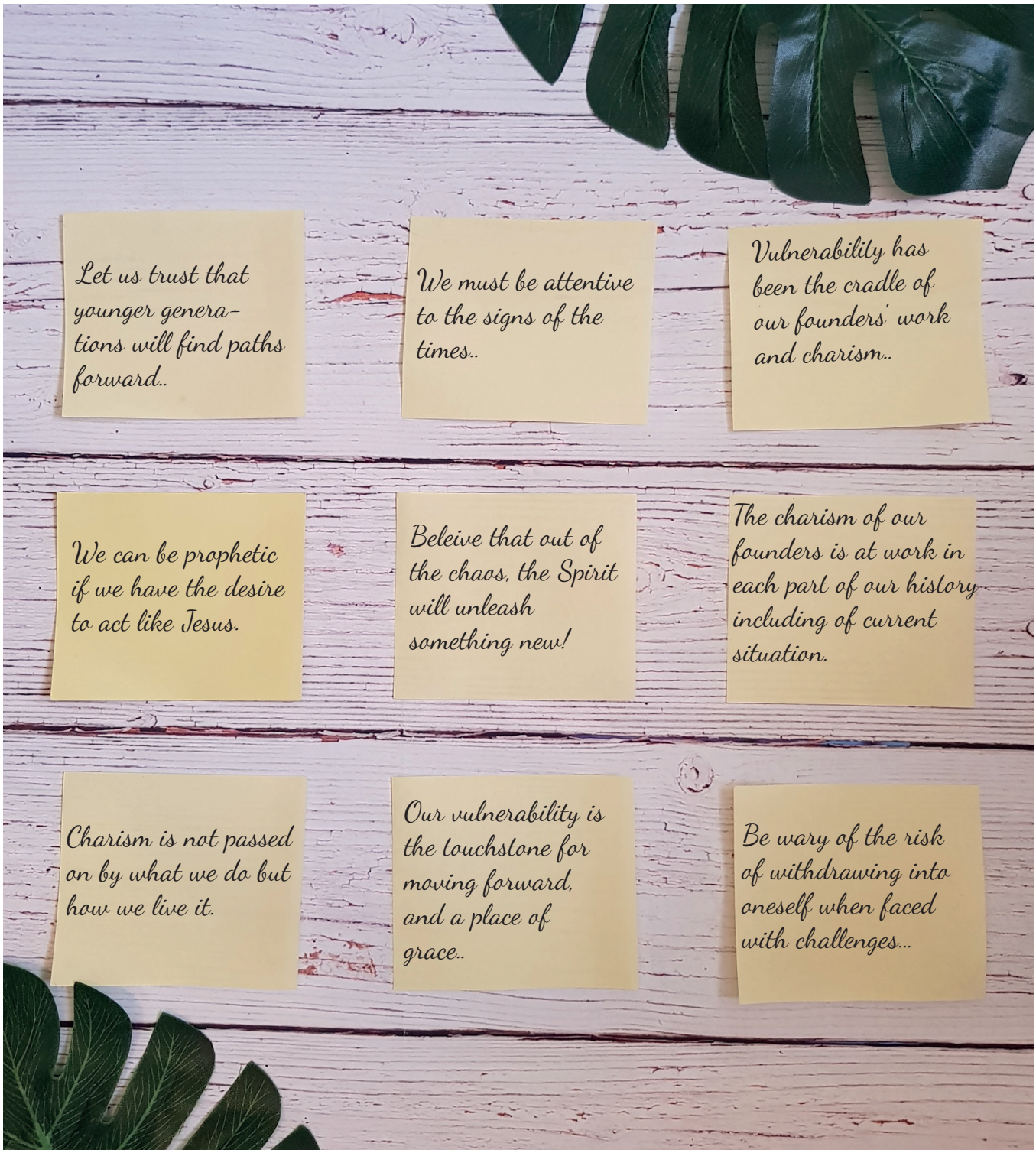
---

1 Message for the National Week of Institutes of Consecrated Life in Spain, May 17, 2021.

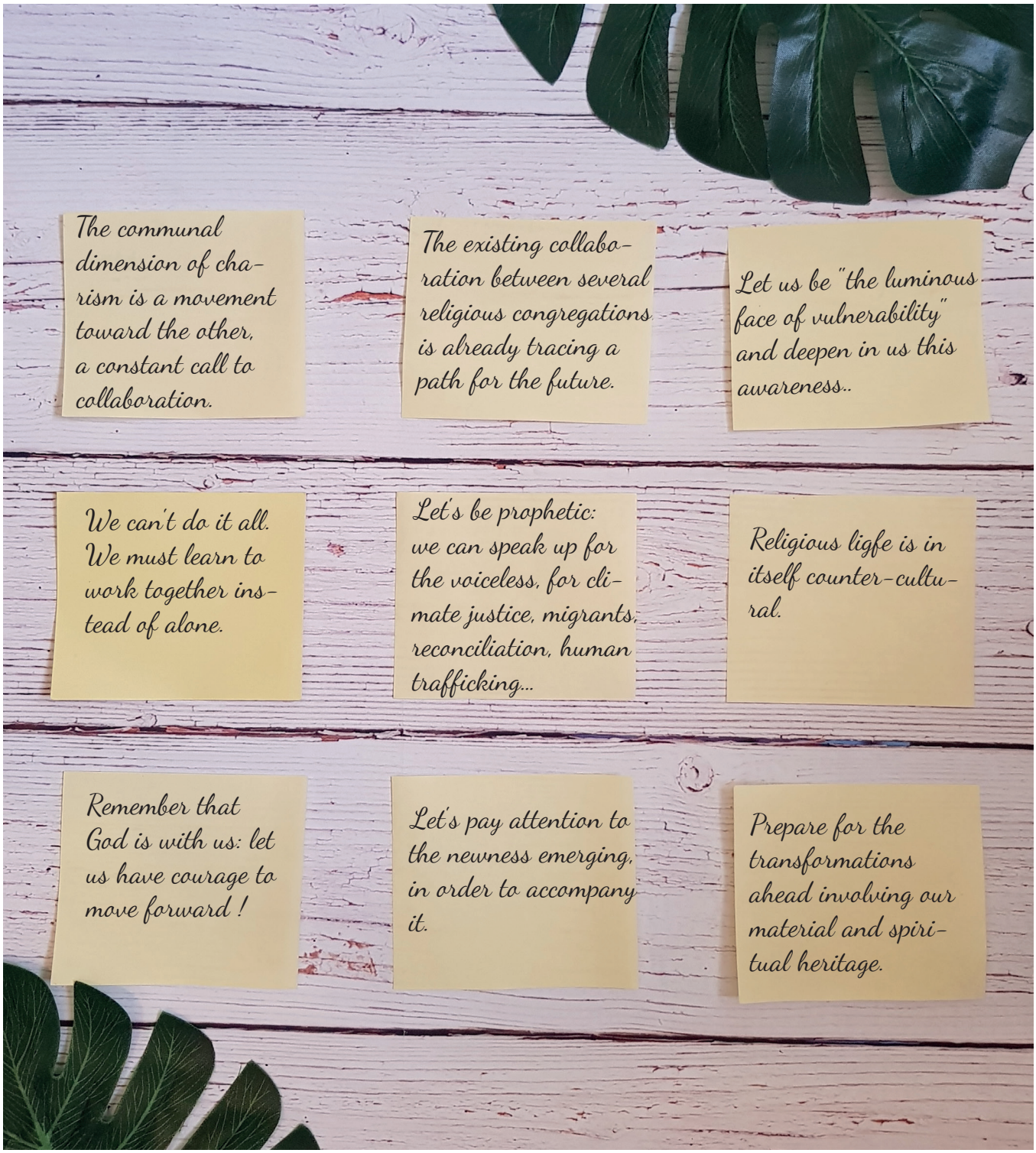
2 It would be pertinent to reread, in the Spiritual and Historical Writings of Quebec, the passage where Mary of the Incarnation relates her understanding of the Canadian Church, built not of stones, but of crucified persons.. See XLVI, p. 236–237.

ECHOES FROM THE OCTOBER 2021 FORUMS [1]

What calls do you sense are emerging ? What joys and resistances can be felt ? What are some paths forward, both personally and for your communities ?



[1] Elements drawn from the synthesis of reports received from participants. Twenty groups participated in the virtual forums on October 17 and 19, 2021 and submitted subsequent reports. There were 12 Francophone groups and 8 Anglophone groups.



Does **Our Charism** Nourish Our Hope?

Sr. Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS *

The subject of charism, which was addressed by the forums held during fall of 2021, enabled convictions to be expressed, showed theological content in evolution, raised questions and formulated needs. In addition, the present retrospective leaves us with a question. Does the charism of our Institute nourish our hope? This challenge urges us to remain on the journey, listening to the Spirit at the heart of the charism.

Retrospectives

Among the observations made, the conviction emerges that the charism, a gift of God in service to the Church and one's neighbour, is a dynamic reality that expresses the identity of the Institute, its raison d'être, and its way of entering into relationship with God, with oneself and with others. It originates from the spiritual heritage bequeathed by the founders, and it unfolds through its members who carry this gift of the Spirit and are responsible for living it, incarnating it, making it real and transmitting it. Its prophetic character is born of the experience of the Spirit in the hearts of the founders and is expressed by the fidelity of the members in their own way of living together in conformity with Christ through a more particular aspect of his mystery.



Since Vatican II, theological reflection on the charism of Institutes of Consecrated Life has continued and deepened. It is recognised that *the Constitutions are the expression of the charism*, and *Vita Consecrata* 37 emphasises that they provide a map for the whole journey of Christian discipleship "in accordance with a specific

* Presentation made on November 30, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

charism confirmed by the Church." *The articulation of the charism and its components becomes clearer*. Having manifested itself at the heart of the experience of the Spirit of the founders, the charism is incarnated and actualised from the Institute's spiritual heritage, the mission received and the members' way of life. *In the case of the evangelical counsels, a shift takes place in which one discovers a profound unity between the vows and the charism*. We recognise that the holiness of the consecrated person is no longer linked solely to the evangelical counsels, but is also based on fidelity to the charism. (*VC* 36)

We know that the charism builds the community and that it must permeate all aspects of our religious life. On the other hand, when we talk about its components — which are spirituality, mission and way of life — and their articulation, not everything is clear. The same is true of its transmission in initial and ongoing formation and of the link we make between the charism and the vows. The fact that we are the depositaries or custodians of the charism also raises the question of personal and community responsibility and the commitment that ensues. What about the incarnation of the charism? How does it keep us moving towards God, and moving towards our brothers and sisters in the community and in the world? How is it a place of renewal of our religious life and of missionary creativity in meeting the needs of our societies? How does it propel us towards the future? These questions awaken needs, notably: to go further in understanding the charism of our Institutes, to reflect on its transmission, to develop the aspect of initial and ongoing formation in relation to the charism and to take a renewed look at the relationship between the vows and the charism.

Does our charism nourish our hope ?

At the root of this question is our commitment to follow Christ in a particular Institute, as well as our responsibility towards the charism. In order to incarnate and transmit it, we must live it. The charism is a life project. It needs to be actualised at the heart of the spiritual orientation of the Institute, in the fraternal experience and the mission entrusted to it. This project requires a continuous investment because the process of actualisation, incarnation and transmission of the charism is the basis of the renewal of our Institutes and it is always a work in progress.

The charism is the Word of God for us. It nourishes our life and our hope to the extent that we allow this Word to unfold within us and through us. It challenges us to keep alive the flame of this gift received from the Spirit for the life of the Church and the world. Each and every one of us, individually and collectively, is responsible for this. In a wounded Church and in our weakened communities, our charism challenges us. Let us not allow this long resonance of the gift bequeathed by our founders to weaken. Rooted in the memory of history, it is a source of revival of the work of the Spirit, an invitation to live "from the heart," through the questions that are ours, and a call to the service of the Mystical Body with Jesus, in the times and the world in which we live. This is the place of our future. Do we believe in it?

CRC'S NEW ADDRESS:



MAISON DE MÈRE D'YOUVILLE
138 rue Saint-Pierre, Montreal, H2Y 2L7

Prophetism "in evolution"

Daniel Cadrin, OP *

Here are some elements that stood out in a more immediate way with respect to prophetism, according to the October 2021 forums involving members of the CRC.

- The importance of collaboration between communities and with other bodies. To not function alone or as sole leaders, but in partnership. This dimension was strongly emphasised.
- The role of community life as a sign and meaning of the vows and consecration, emphasising being over doing.
- Relationship with culture: paying attention to what emerges, going against the tide, reflecting on the place of transcendence, the issue of refugees, etc.
- Governance: favouring a co-responsible style.



Elements in relation to prophetism and the other dimensions (charism, responsibility, vulnerability):
- Vulnerability s being perceived as an opening. This came up often.
- The importance of heritage and the founding figures: to be explored, integrated and passed on.
- Age and aging, the relationship with young people: this touches on several aspects.
- The respective places of being and of doing in our consecrated life.
- Incarnation in history, transmission of the charism.
- A hope is emerging.
- The Synod on synodality and its calls. This can open many perspectives – to be continued!

There are also various elements that touch on the CRC as such, its role and its projects.

Finally, the question of being present in the culture, in a changing society, with its diverse currents, underscores the challenge of adapting ourselves, as Vatican II called for, but also the audacity to go against the tide and to innovate. Both tendencies are found in consecrated life and have marked it throughout its history: being with, being apart. Discernment must be exercised (Phil 4:8), to avoid conformism (being well integrated, following the tides) or sectarianism (being apart, criticizing everything).

* Presentation made on November 30, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

When **Vulnerability** Opens a Future...

Sr. Nathalie Roberge, OP *

Inspired by the General Assembly of 2021, during which we had the opportunity to share our experience of vulnerability, the Holy Spirit allowed us to become more aware of the luminous side of that vulnerability. This had the effect of a balm in the midst of the current challenges, reviving us on spiritual and missionary levels. It is a grace that we are being invited to delve more deeply into, on personal and community levels. Because our ability to enter the future as consecrated persons depends, among other things, on our relationship with vulnerability.

In that sense, it is important to remind ourselves that our vulnerability is not an obstacle to living love to the utmost in following Christ. On the contrary, consenting to live in our vulnerability is a prophetic act that conforms us ever more fully to Christ.

On this subject, Tiziano Ferraroni writes: "Once we have verified that vulnerability is one of the essential ingredients of spiritual life, we must learn to become vulnerable in the manner of Christ."[1] It seems to me that there is a field to explore here: "learning to become vulnerable in the manner of Christ."

Together, we have already laid down some benchmarks. What is more, we have recalled that vulnerability is an opportunity to be more available to the Holy Spirit. It allows us to revisit some major spiritual attitudes, such as letting go, surrender, trust in God, but also intercession, offering, gratitude, etc. Our hearts are thus expanded. They develop a contemplative view of reality.

Moreover, the situation of vulnerability that we are confronting is calling us to a certain exodus. It is pushing us to leave our safe zones by risking being more open to others, listening, co-responsibility, mutual support, inclusion, sharing, communion, interculturality, synodality, etc. These are words that resonate strongly for us, but also for our contemporaries. What traces of this experience will we leave for the future? Will the call to embark on a synodal journey be only an interlude in our history or will it leave a lasting mark on our conception of consecrated life?

As Claire-Anne Baudin points out, "Without it [vulnerability], man is not a free subject but a hermetic fortress. The self-sufficient self is always already a dead self."3

Clearly, we want to live and write another page of history. How, through the vulnerability we are experiencing, will we continue to carry and pass on our legacy? What particular calls is the Holy Spirit making to us in the midst of the current stripping away? For the Spirit is always at work. He

* Presentation made on November 30, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

is always ahead of us. But the tenuous breath of the Spirit is sometimes difficult to perceive. Hence the importance of being vigilant so as not to stifle the new creation that He brings forth.

In light of the journey we have travelled together in recent months, a prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours takes on new depth: "Lord, you open up the riches of your Holy Spirit to those who love you, and you make your own life grow in them by giving them a share in the body of your Son; help them to behave in the world as children of God called to freedom: may they respond with the holiness of their lives to the prophetic mission of the Church." (Francophone Office of Lauds, Tuesday II, freely translated here).

Holiness and prophecy are intimately linked. Vulnerability is part of both. Therefore, if we accept our vulnerability as an essential element in the coming of the Kingdom, we can surely open up a future.

[1] Tiziano Ferraroni, *La brèche intérieure. La vulnérabilité du sujet devant Dieu*, Éditions Facultés Jésuites de Paris, p. 169. Recension du livre dans Nouvelle Revue Théologique, Janvier-Mars 2021, Tome 143 -1, p. 119.
[2] Claire-Anne Baudin, *Christus* 272, octobre 2021, p. 118.



Discernment: Tending the Gifts of Charism and Prophetism

Sr. Lorraine D'Entremont, SC *

My contribution to the September 2021 panel that launched the CRC reflection process for fall and winter 2021-2022 was to prepare reflection and conversation guide questions for participants. The questions had some elements one might consider in a discernment process, and offered points of entry for dialogue on the topics of charism, prophecy and vulnerability presented by my colleagues of the CRC's Theological Commission.

Given that I had not made a presentation on discernment, I was pleasantly surprised by the degree to which references to discernment emerged in the forum conversations. In fifteen of twenty group reports, I found numerous statements implying or referring to discernment, the necessity of and desire for discernment.

The references were rich and diverse, and I quote some of them, in the hope you will get the 'flavour' of the group conversations. The comments are arranged in themes according to the dimensions of discernment that emerged in the reports.

Discernment as an essential element

"Letting God open the dialogue and listening to God's calls…it is the key to moving to a creative stage."

"To follow the current of God and to listen to the Spirit is essential. [The Spirit] is the builder of hope."

"This is a vulnerable time, which requires a strong connection to the Spirit to guide our listening and responding."

Discerning the signs of the times

"Discern the hidden signs of transcendence in our society."

"Where does society need the commitment of consecrated life: in what sector, in what situation, is the Spirit calling us?"

"This is a vulnerable time, which requires a strong connection to the Spirit to guide the listening and responding."

Discerning prophetics gifts and action

On being prophetic in our time: "We choose our leadership through prayer and discernment, not through political action."

* Presentation made on November 30, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

On the challenge of prophetic engagement in the concerns of our time: "We have taken initiative on some of these issues, but not all. Another part of this challenge is which issues are most important?"

"Dusting off the prophetic charism of our institutes requires discernment and prayer."

Discerning together

"To form small groups of people to share the Lord's action in their lives"

"We must continue to gather, to exchange, and who knows, a common project could emerge from the exchanges, a project that only the Holy Spirit knows about!"

"While the structures of the Church and religious life are falling apart, we trust that out of the chaos, through synodality, the Spirit will unleash something new."

During the February 2022 webinar, Fr. Gilles Routhier emphasized that both charism and prophecy or prophetic action are relational gifts, in that they are given to us by God, for a community or group in a particular historical time and place. This must be our 'point of departure' when we are seeking to know our mission in the world in vulnerable times for our congregations and the world, rather than numbers and age in our congregations, the enormity of societal needs, etc.

It seems to me that if we want to 'tend' – that is to welcome, support and guide – these gifts, we need to engage in individual and communal, honest and ongoing discernment that keeps refocusing us on our 'point of departure.' The participants' spontaneous and numerous references to discernment seem indicate the need and desire for this. A challenge will be to identify or develop the discernment processes or models best suited to each group or situation.

Charism and Prophetism: emerging questions

Michel Proulx, O. PRAEM. *

The following reflections and questions arose during my study of the 2021 October forum reports.

- We talk a lot about our prophetic mission. However, despite wanting to identify as prophets, I find us very preoccupied with ourselves, our identity, and our vocation. I feel like I'm dealing with people and an institution that are searching for themselves. It doesn't sound much like the biblical prophets who talk very little about themselves. Rather, they are all about their mission. I find us very "self-referential," to use a word from Pope Francis.

- One team report mentioned: "The three aspects of the prophet are to build, to exhort and to encourage." This vision of the prophet's work is largely incomplete and even biased. It lacks the whole dimension of criticism and denunciation. Even

* Presentation made on November 30, 2021, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

more, it misses the most fundamental aspect: being a spokesman for God. The prophets do not speak for themselves, hence the expressions "Thus says the Lord", translating the Hebrew "oracle of YHWH". Why is it that we talk a lot about prophecy, but very little about God?

- We often discussed our prophetic character, but the reflection does not go far enough most of the time. I've heard a lot of "this or that is prophetic", but I've heard very little about what God would like to express through it. How is this or that the word of God? We lack a discernment process to understand what we believe to be prophetic in relation to God's plan or in relation to the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. The reflection remains too down-to-earth. The theological dimension is missing. Our lens of faith doesn't seem well adjusted, in my opinion.

- We talk a lot about being prophetic and vulnerability as if that characterized us. Are we as prophetic and as "against the grain" as we want to believe? Around us, there are so many couples and families who experience vulnerability! There are so many families weakened by separation and divorce, by the discovery of new psychosexual identities. Are we not simply a reflection of our fragile society?

- Our Canadian society is aging. Everywhere, it seems succession is a challenge, there is a lack of people in the workforce. What makes us so different and prophetic? Are we not cobbling together a spirituality that is more circumstantial than evangelical?

- Unlike the false prophets, the authentic biblical prophets were usually against the current. We should ask ourselves if we are mostly in the mainstream. I get the impression that we are more interested in consoling ourselves than in sending signals and proclaiming the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.

- We put a lot of emphasis on the prophetic model. It seems to me that this should not be the only model with which we should identify. Does this model best express what our founders and foundresses and our predecessors wanted to live? Wouldn't they have identified more with the concept of "missionary disciples"? Why do we want to identify ourselves as "prophets"? What is behind this?

- I'm surprised that our fall 2021 discussions made very little reference to Jesus. Isn't religious life about following Jesus closely by adopting a lifestyle similar to his? It is surprising that the sequela Christi, "the following of Christ" was not mentioned by any group report. How can this lack of Christological reference be explained? For me, this is very questioning.

- There seems to be a generalized resignation regarding the possibility of welcoming new members in the various Institutes. I also wonder about there being very little concern for the younger members of our communities. Can a spirituality of vulnerability be energizing for them?

NEXT ACTIVITY - Wednesday September 28 2022

WEBINAR

« From fragility to grace » : Vulnerability as a space of transformation

This webinar will explore the notion of vulnerability through a variety of perspectives, to show its creative potential.

LOCAL TIMES:

Newfoundland Daylight Saving Time (NDT): from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m.
Atlantic Daylight Saving Time (ADT): from 12:00 to 13:30 p.m.
Eastern Daylight Saving Time (EDT): from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Central Daylight Saving Time (CDT): from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Mountain Daylight Saving Time (MDT): from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.
Pacific Daylight Saving Time (PDT): from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m.

CRC MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE AN INVITATION BY EMAIL

A Charism received for Missioning Towards Others

Gilles Routhier, Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval *

You probably are aware that the concepts of charism and prophetism which you have been exploring these past months are in fact relational concepts. Understanding them as such leads us to a process of decentering ourselves, to inhabit the world in a more just manner.

In a Christian regime, the relational character of charism is obvious. Charism is a gift, a grace of divine origin. This gift does not belong to us; it is received from another. Today, we often speak of "the self-made man" – he who builds himself up and whose success and achievements result from his actions, decisions, and efforts. In that sense, a charismatic person has a power of fascination. However, in a Christian regime, we recognize that we owe our character to others, and we are not deemed "charismatic" solely from the sum of our performances; charism is not based on merit, and is not the result of efforts, exercise, or training. Charism is a gift, and nothing is stranger to that notion than to qualify it possessively as "**my** charism" or "**our** charism", as if we owned it. Moreover, this spiritual gift, "donated" by another, must act in us, have an effect, and transform us. It must work within us, and be felt in our flesh, and in the "flesh" of our institutions. Otherwise, we would not be able to speak of the charism of our congregation. It is given to edify, or it is useless.

The most important passage in Scripture about charisms is found in the First letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 12, where the term charism is used five times, a reflection that Paul concludes with the hymn of charity (chapter 13). The charism we receive immediately turns us towards others. *But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way* (1 Co 12:31). Charism is a gift from God for the sake of service to others. In this generous reflection on the spiritual gifts (chapters 12 to 14), whose summit is the exposition of the outstanding gift of love, Paul repeats that they are given by the Spirit with the goal of upbuilding (to edify), and therefore can be ordered in a hierarchy.

The same reflection goes for prophetism. To be prophetic is not something like a personal property. In fact, no one can claim to be prophetic as if it were a career choice. To do so would make one a false prophet, as was the case of the prophets in the royal sanctuaries, "professional" prophets serving the interests of the king and supporting his power (we see this described in the book of Amos). One cannot be a prophet by trade, nor can one claim such a title. Consider the stories of prophetic vocations in the Old

* Presentation made on February 23, 2022, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

Testament. The prophet Amos says, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees" (Am 7:14) – so he answered to those who wished to send him away, to prophesy far from the royal sanctuary of Bethel. In fact, Amos was not one of those "professional prophets" who earned a living from this trade, without providing much for the people. … *and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'* (Am 7:15).

The prophetic vocation narratives of Isaiah (ch. 6) and Jeremy are along the same lines. The latter wants to escape and will only be a prophet despite himself:

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, […] "I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." (Jr 1:4-6)1. This missioning which constitutes someone as a prophet defines the relational character of the prophetic being: God says "Go" and sends him to the people.

Just like charism, in a way, prophetism is received. We are prophets despite ourselves, against our own will. It is not something desired and cannot be ambitioned. One doesn't wish to become a prophet. It is God who works within the person called to be a prophet. So we see with the prophet Jeremy: "I *appointed you a prophet to the nations*." (Jr 1:5). It is God who is at work. No one goes to "prophetic school"! Jeremy says, "*Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy*" (1:6). This echoes Moses who couldn't imagine speaking to Pharaoh or being gifted enough to do so, and therefore pleaded with God to send another (Exodus 4:10-13).

What of our congregations, then? Do we protest due to our insufficiency or our inability? Do we believe that we are incapable, or do we claim our status as prophets, putting forth our charism?

From I've read and heard of your reflections these past months, I gather this: the awareness of your vulnerability and your fragility, which corresponds to the same awareness of many of your foundresses and founders, also fragile persons, is helpful to us insofar as it allows us to rethink the question of charism and to renew our relationship to the Church and to the world, in a more just perspective. In doing so, we can determine a new starting point: not that of a charism belonging to us, that we can define, expose and offer, but that of a charism received anew, for the Church today, and for the world.

It is the same for mission. I take issue, more and more, with speeches that set fort "our mission". Today, with regards to the most classical theology, the term "mission" has been deviated from its initial meaning. The term has in fact been appropriated by administrative sciences and management and popularized, hence we find it in every organization's official documents. For this reason, we speak of the mission of a hospital or a university; the mission of this government Ministry or that cooperative; that organization or that company, etc. This successful reappropriation has led to pervert the original meaning or make it obsolete. Nowadays, "mission" means the tasks accomplished by someone, what they do and produce, the tasks they are entrusted with. The mission is therefore identified with the office or function one has. Mission is also equated with the goal assigned to a service or a company, the purpose we assign ourselves and express in a mission statement. It is the objective we strive to attain, and ultimately, the role we want to play.

According to etymology, and specifically the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, the first meaning of the term mission, from the latin *missio*, past participle of the verb *mittere*, refers to the action of sending. The term was mostly used in the Navy or in commerce and designates the dispatching of the fleet for military or commercial purposes. It is this secular meaning which Christians used to understand God's

action: the Father send the Son and the Holy Spirit. This same sole meaning is found in the *Summa Theologica*, in the 13th century. The term is used in question 43 about "the missions of the divine persons" and in question 112 about the angels' mission. In both cases, what is at stake is the relationship created between the person who is missioned and the one who sends them. The awareness of being sent by the Father is so crucial for Jesus that he refers to himself as being sent by God. This is especially manifest in the gospel according to John, but also present in the three other gospels. Sent by God, Jesus in turn sends the disciples. Also, since he is sent, he is destined to encounter those to whom he is sent. There is no mission (no sending) without a prior relationship and a relationship ahead.

The extension of the meaning of the term mission and the diminishment of its original meaning came to be during the 17th century, and the consequence was the disappearance of the relational character of the term. What is set forth, first and foremost, is no longer the action of an extroverted God, hearing the cries of humanity, seeing the misery of His people, and *their cry on account of their taskmasters* (Ex 3:7). This relational God knows the sufferings of His people and commits himself to freeing them, by sending His servant, Moses, rather than being passive and unmoved.

If mission now represents a task that I can accomplish, a role that is mine or a goal I pursue, instead of the action of another who sends me, then that focuses on me as the center, rather than God being the active subject of the mission. The action is transferred from He who sends to the person who is missioned. In this modern perspective, the emphasis is on ME who has a mission and becomes the primary subject and center focus. A displacement is observed: the active subject who missioned/sent was, initially, God; now the one who is sent is the center of action, and God is relegated behind-the-scenes. On top of that, the idea of "going out" and moving for mission is also diminished. We end up displaying "the mission of our congregation" while thinking that "our" mission can be decided by the general chapter, instead of receiving our mission while



trembling… This is the result of putting ourselves in the center as subjects of the action and initiative.

During Vatican II, after a lengthy reflection on missiology, a choice was deliberately made to come back to the original meaning of the word mission. The schema on missions, as elaborated by the central preparatory commission was initially titled *De Missionibus,* but underwent a significant change in title, and was finally called *De activitate missionali Ecclesiae*. This change came to be in May 1964. Only in May 1965 did the classical theological perspective return to the forefront. Hence, chapter 1 of *Ad gentes* unfolds the missionnary movement in this manner: no. 1 titled *Propositum Patris* (God's design) is followed by nos. 2 and 3, respectively titled *Missio filii* and *Missio Spiritus Sancti*, the mission (sending) of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Following that, it would have been expected to title no. 4 as *Missio Ecclesiae*, but that wasn't the case. It is titled *Ecclesia a Christo missa* (the Church sent by Christ). So, the term missio is reserved for the missioning, by the Father, of the Son and the Spirit, highlighting the fact that God "comes out of Himself". As for the Church, the passive form defines it: She is sent by someone else and receives (from Him) Her destination

and mandate. Generally speaking (albeit a few exceptions), the A*d Gentes* decree reserves the term missio for God's action of missioning, while talking about the "missionary activity" of the Church (*activitas missionalis*) on 14 occasions; its "missionary action" (*actio missionalis)* on six occasions, and its "missionary works" (*opus missionale*) on 12 occasions. This shows that *Ad gentes* uses the expression *missio Ecclesiae* in an exceptional manner, thereby conforming in this usage to that of the New Testament, that never speaks of the mission of the Church nor of the mission of the Twelve, or the disciples. In verses where the term mission appears (translated as such), the original Greek is "sent", like in Mt 10:5; Ac 13:4 and 22:5, or 2 Co 2:16.

Taking this into account, the Church (and a religious congregation), insofar as it wishes to inhabit the world in a just perspective, must understand itself at the heart of this relationship with God, who so loved the world that He sent His Son to humanity (Jn 3:16). As for us, we are simply of service to this relationship. Our existence is founded in this love of God for humanity: it constitutes us and sends us forth. This relationship is the right starting point. We must not, for that reason, start with "our mission", but rather with God's missioning to the world. If we want to speak of ourselves, we can only do so, in reference to the Bible, to acknowledge our weakness, our fear, our fragilities, our vulnerability, our incapacity, our old age.

Also helpful in shedding light on these considerations is revisiting the history of your foundresses and founders. There weren't many heroes in their lot. They were fragile and sickly persons. To be a prophet means to be taken "from following the flock", as it went for Moses, David and a few others. Elisha was not a prophet either, but a ploughman, yet he was recruited by Elijah to be a prophet (1 Kg 19:19), just like Amos who was a herdsman (Am 7:14). This is what it means: let yourself be seized, where you are, and led elsewhere, against your will, despite your resistance, your refusal and your incapacity. This is the meaning of "returning to your founders" and to the biblical tradition.

In fact, don't let your starting point be the current state of your congregation, and don't let actuarial planning rule over you, as useful as those figures may be. These are not the starting points. Rather, it is what God wants to do amid humanity, in today's reality. Don't stop at yourself and don't put yourself in the center.

On the basis of Scripture, we can affirm that calls always emerge in particular contexts and are always finalized through a missioning. "Therefore, prophesy" (Ez 36:6). This call arises in a specific historical situation. We need to take up again the "reading of the signs of the times" to discern what is "labouring" in humanity today. The situation we need to read is not that of consecrated life in Canada. No. We need to review the current situation of women, men, children, and the state of culture and society to discern, with deep listening, the calls, the questions, the anxieties, etc. Your foundresses and founders perceived something in those signs of the times, and it set them in motion. Prophets were raised up during singular moments of the people's journey. Ezekiel during the Exile; Jeremy, Isaiah, Jonah, and others during a time of decadence, and so on. Their vocation is inseparable from a historical moment and situation. This is why we need to heed the "calls" of our times. If we remove the historical, social, political and religious contexts in which prophets emerge, we cannot understand their vocation and their prophetic character. If we know nothing of the people of Israel, we cannot speak of Moses. His calling is incomprehensible if detached from his missioning to free the sons of Jacob. On this basis, I can affirm that "vocation" (calling), a term I prefer to "mission" in this case, or the charism that may lead to prophetism, is inseparable from social, political, and spiritual evolutions.

What are the important "calls" of our times? The answer to that question will have us discerning what our vocation is and will enable us to see more clearly to whom we are sent. In the Old Testament, all the callings are indissociable from a missioning. The order to

"go", go beyond yourself or beyond your community's reality, is what constitutes the prophet. All our planning cannot create prophetism. Moreover, vocation, in the strict sense, is not addressed only to the conscience of an individual. It is equally destined to institutes and communities. We are not simply in the presence of individuals in whom grace has worked, outside of any sociohistorical considerations, but we are in the presence of individuals who are rooted in a people. This is the destination we are invited to go to, to leave our country for, to leave our home and go *to the land that I will show you* (Gn 12:1).

Exploring the history of the Church leads us to the same teachings as Scripture. With regards to the advent of institutes and religious congregations in Quebec (and elsewhere), the Gospel always encounters a specific social situation. What we have named "the charism" of an institute is in effect the particular spiritual intuition that led to expressing a commitment, in the form of works or a lifestyle, that actualize the following of Christ in a given historical circumstance. The "charism" is the crystallization, within a project or a commitment (works or lifestyle) of a spiritual intuition that allows for the Gospel to be understood anew, grasped both deeply and in a nutshell. It is a desire for salvation in an ecclesial and social situation that commands the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation, and the grace offered by God as Saviour.

Be it Marcelle Mallette, Émilie Tavernier, Virginie Fournier or Élisabeth Turgeon, to name only those examples, we always find, in their foundation, an important connection between their works and the lifestyle they assume, and a significant trait of the history of their times. They are so fully present to the anguish of their context – having experienced them firsthand, sometimes – that we can affirm that their life commitment and works perfectly espoused the spirit of their age. Grace worked through these women, in their time and place, to make them figures of the Gospel and manifestations of God's redemption.

Just like the figure of Moses is indissociable from the story of Hebrew slavery in Egypt, or Ezekiel from the experience of exile, the figure of Virginie Fournier and her three original companions cannot be understood without reference to the rural experience and the exodus of French Canadians to the United States in the 19th century. The same goes for Marcelle Mallette, if she is dissociated from the middle of the 19th century and its misery, poverty, epidemics, etc. As for Élisabeth Turgeon, also of the 19th century, her life is connected with the southern coast of the St. Lawrence River and the establishment of new populations in the inland regions now known as the dioceses of Rimouski and de Gaspé. These women received a charism (a spiritual gift) to proclaim God's salvation, despite themselves and their fragility.

We must therefore affirm that charism and prophetism are relative realities – that is, they are not primary realities. Consequently, we are asked first of all to be relational beings, to listen to God who calls and sends, and to listen to the needs and the distress of humanity. From there, charism and prophetism as second, relational realities will surprise us and impose themselves upon us, despite our fragility and resistance. The primary reality is to listen to God, calling us in a given situation, culture, society, world. Then, we must receive and welcome the grace, charism, and gifts that God continues to offer today. God has not abandoned this humanity that cries out and whom He loves. To recognize His calling and His spiritual gifts to us is of much greater value than trying to devise our own charism.

We must be seized, laboured, and modeled by God. We must be like seismographs, recording the movements of the earth's layers, the social and cultural movements. Charism is the gift God offers to you in this situation – you who are vulnerable, who may desire to sit and stay, in the comfort and happiness of old age. May God expose you: if charism comes from the Spirit, then may the Spirit send you towards the high winds.

Future Reflections

Sr. Elizabeth Davis, RSM *



Our Reflections to Date

During September, October and November 2021, we were blessed with rich reflections on charism and the prophetic character of consecrated life in Canada by Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS, Daniel Cadrin, OP, Nathalie Roberge, OP, and Lorraine D'Entremont, SC, from the CRC's Theological Commission. Reflection groups then deepened these learnings with echoes from the lived experience of women religious and men religious across Canada.

Consistent themes resounded in these reflections. Charism was clearly understood as a gift both for individuals and for communities – flowing from the Spirit, rooted in Scripture, and intended for the building up of religious institutes, Church, society, Earth, and all creation. Charism is incarnated in history and is, therefore, dynamic and evolving. It is lived out in the proclamation of the evangelical counsels, the diverse expressions of spiritual life, the witness to life in community, and engagement in ministry.

Charism is the catalyst for the prophetic character, a distinctive sign of the presence of the Spirit, reaching out to Earth and to Earth's creatures. Prophetic action is closely linked to what is happening in the social, political, economic, religious, cultural, and environmental domains of our world. While prophetism is very much tied to the present, it is not locked in the present, but it takes place over a long period of time. It is rooted in a memory, it assumes an historical heritage, and it opens up a future based on promise.

Individuals, communities, networks, organizations, or coalitions can be prophetic. They "prophesy" through words and

* Presentation made on February 23, 2022, as part of the CRC webinar on Charism and Prophetism in Consecrated Life.

actions, gestures, projects, lifestyles, vows, meditations, writings, and social media. In today's world, prophetism focuses on such diverse realities as climate change, migrants, interculturality, violence and victims, belonging and identities, aging and care, governance and civic life, secularity and transcendence, and material and spiritual heritage.

Both charism and prophetism are lived in our time in a new awareness of the vulnerability of persons living the consecrated life and the vulnerability of the religious institutes in which they live. This vulnerability is in stark contrast to the realities of strength, influence, and voice of authority which characterized the religious institutes when most of us living consecrated life today entered religious communities. Even though at the time of our entering we were formed to see ourselves individually as humble and obedient, the religious communities in which we lived were powerhouses in education, health care, parishes, and social services across Canada. Our very presence in our distinctive dress marked us as special, as persons to be respected, and as leaders in the ministries which we founded, lead, operated, and often funded.

In the reflections in late 2021, many spoke of this time of vulnerability as a moment of dialogue with a call to be open to the Spirit, to see our fragility as a theological place of encounter with the Lord, and to entrust ourselves to God. Vulnerability frees us to truly hear the words of Pope Francis, "Do not fear limits! Do not be afraid of frontiers! Do not fear the peripheries! For it is there that the Spirit will speak to you."[1] Our newly realized vulnerability becomes an opportunity to open ourselves up to others, to establish relationships, to grow in solidarity, and to stimulate our creativity. It pushes us to go beyond our usual frameworks, to broaden our horizons, and to accept graciously the presence and commitment of our lay associates.

This is a very brief summary of what has been reflected and said thus far in the CRC's focused attention to charism and prophetism in consecrated life in Canada.

To What Is the God of our Future Calling Us?

And so, we ask, "To What Is the God of our Future Calling Us?" Each one of us came into religious institutes with many gifts and graces embedded in our very being. One of the greatest joys of religious life has been the melding of these gifts and graces, over the years since our congregation was founded, into one special gift which we name as our unique charism. Our individual gifts did not disappear when we embraced our congregational charism. No, our diverse gifts were strengthened by the founding charism even as they, in turn, brought new strength and depth to that charism. The deepening continues each day in ways that we could never have imagined when we first made our religious profession.

As congregations and institutes who share the same founding charism merge or fuse, they help deepen their unique charism lived and shaped over time in different realities and in different cultures. However, we are slower to find creative and energizing ways to allow the charism of our individual institutes or congregations to strengthen and deepen each other's charisms.

As mostly older individuals in our communities and as congregations/institutes with far fewer members, we are certainly more vulnerable today than we were from the 1950s to the 1980s. But we must be careful not to conclude that we now share the real experience of the vulnerability of persons who are poor or trafficked or abused or disrespected. Every one of us is safe and secure; every one of us has the privilege of having health care and protection when we need it; every one of us enjoys good food and clean water. Our vulnerability reflects a loss of some power and influence, but it does not reflect lives of want or despair or poverty.

We must be humble in acknowledging our new vulnerability and coming to understand it through the lens of charism. We must see charism as the opportunity to place our trust more deeply in the God who calls us

into a new and uncertain future. We must see charism as the challenge to find the new ways of being prophetic by daring to walk the peripheries and the boundaries where new possibilities come alive.

Where are these peripheries and boundaries? Some are yet to be known, but many are already quite clear:

~ **the shattering of our theological understanding with the emergence of cosmology and of deep incarnation** – we are growing in our awareness that the first incarnation of our God was the birth of the universe. The next incarnation was in the person of Jesus, and the ongoing incarnation is in the new life among us from the newborn child to the newborn star. Deep incarnation is that sense of Jesus the Christ, the Risen One, who is one with us in our suffering and in our pain – as humans, as other-than-humans, as the sacred communion of all creation.

~ **the expansion of our understanding of ministry with the emergence of ecology and our call to care for our common home, Earth** – we are one with a small percentage of people around the world who are taking seriously the need to care for Earth and all Earth creatures. We have learned from liberation theologians that the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor are one. We have learned this same lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by our failure to care for Earth and having its greatest negative impact on the most vulnerable persons among us.

~ **the joy of personal, communal, and global contemplation** – for most of us when we entered religious life, contemplation was a way of praying that was personal to me and God. We have grown much more deeply into the practice of communal contemplation as (in the words of Constance Fitzgerald, OCD) "a constant questioning and restlessness that waits for and believes in the coming of a transformed vision of God... a new and integrating spirituality capable of creating a new politics and generating new social structures." In more recent times, we have entered into global contemplation, connecting across the many countries in which our congregations and institutes are privileged to live, to walk, and to minister. Through this practice of global contemplation, we are learning the new language, shaping the new theologies and spiritualities, and forming the new ministries that respond to God's call to us into our new future. Now we truly are able to rejoice in God's imagination!

~ **the wonder and the grace of inclusion** – we were so self-sufficient in years past that we never knew the joy of inclusion, of sharing our charism-blessed journey with each other and with lay colleagues. Today we have no choice but do so, but how enriched our lives have become as we learn from each other's congregations, other faith traditions, other lived experiences, other cultures, other ways of dancing and singing. We have even begun to believe Job who reminds us to "ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the Earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you" (Job 12:7-8).

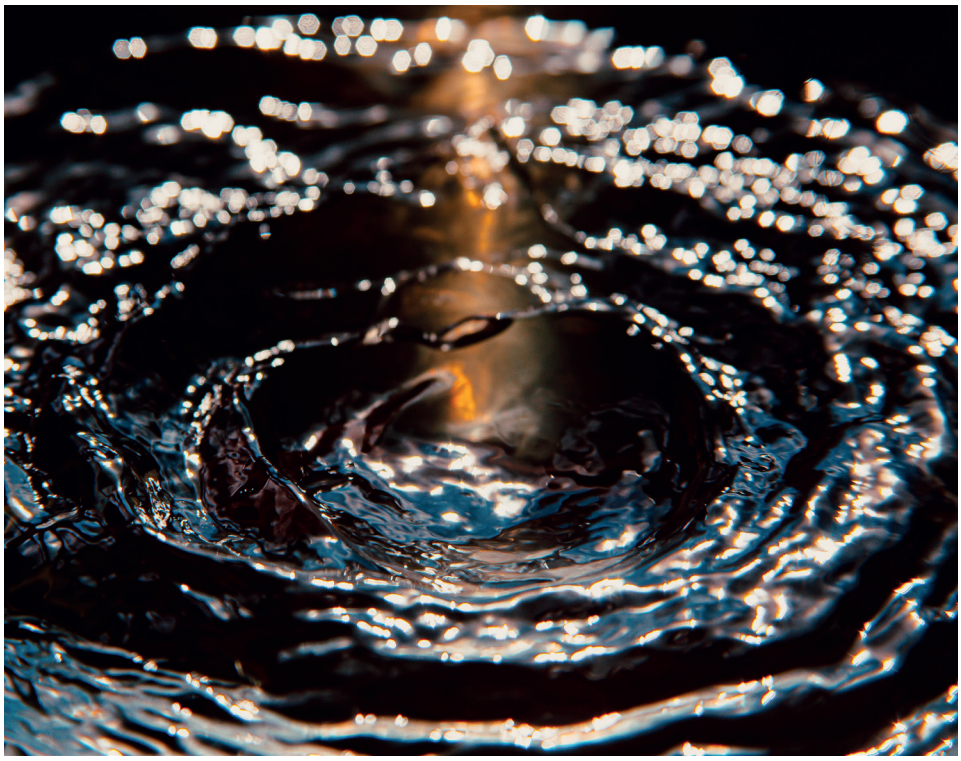
~ **radical hospitality** – in early 2016, LCWR published Avanti!, a collection of reflections written by 30 LCWR members about responding to God who comes to us from the future and invites us to come forward. My reflection in that journal speaks to the weaving of charism and prophecy through radical hospitality:
"I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt 25:35). God, coming from the future, whispers to us that uncertain times and places cry out for radical inclusion. This God dares us to look closely at those whom we invite to our tables and at our relationships with guests who are strangers or strange, not looking like us, not sharing our values. This God dares us to listen with "the ears of our hearts" to the cries of a hungry child, an abused woman, a trafficked teenager, a tormented mentally ill man, a dying person, a lonely elder, a displaced family, fractured land, poisoned water, a wounded Earth. Inclusive welcoming will lead us to risk, cause us to challenge a social order which keeps people poor, and make us realize that we are not masters but guests of Earth. Our one certainty is rooted in

this God's promise, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all ... your young ones shall see visions, and your old ones shall dream dreams" (Joel 2:28/Acts 2:17).

Perhaps the most humbling teaching of charism and prophetism is that these gifts were generously given to us by our loving God to be deepened in community and to be given in the service of others and Earth. Neither our older age nor our fewer numbers are reasons to refuse these gifts. Our new circumstances simply dare us to find new ways, in community and in ministry, to share our unique charism and to focus our prophetic voice. We trust that the God who gives us the gifts will also give us the strength, the wisdom, the energy, and the confidence to do so. All else we leave to God!

A poem by Mary Wickham RSM, entitled "Influence," is a source of consolation, hope, and trust as we respond to the God who invites us into our future, God's future:

If you are a stone
thrown by the sure
Hand of Kindness
into a pool,
you may not know
the full extent
nor ever glimpse
your widest ripples
as they circle and spread
and find themselves
lapping the feet
of one or two or three
unknown to you
on a far shore.



You may not know
the circles you make
and the waters you grace
but make them you will
and grace you have been
by the hand of the One
who gave you to the water.

[1] From the video message of His Holiness Pope Francis, on the occasion of the 50th National Week of Institutes of Consecrated Life in Spain, May 17, 2021.

WWW.CRC-CANADA.ORG

About

The CRC

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

"The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe."

Mission statement adopted in 2010

ad vitam

Launched in 2019 by the Canadian Religious Conference, ad vitam is a webzine and a window into consecrated life in Canada. Featuring articles and audio-visual media, ad vitam proposes theological and pastoral reflections on the Catholic Church and consecrated life. This resource aims to serve religious communities and their leadership, as well as readers interested in consecrated life and Church issues.

Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Sabrina Di Matteo

PRODUCTION
Yves Deschênes

COLLABORATORS
Daniel Cadrin
Elizabeth Davis
Lorraine D'Entremont
Gaétane Guillemette
Michel Proulx
Nathalie Roberge
Gilles Routhier

CANADIAN RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE
138 rue Saint-Pierre
Montréal, Qc
H2Y 2L7
Tél. : 514 259-0856
info@crc-canada.org
www.crc-canada.org

Please contact the CRC for permission to reproduce articles and images.

Follow us !

crc CONFÉRENCE RELIGIEUSE CANADIENNE | CANADIAN RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE