# INTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP: POTENTIALITIES AND CHALLENGES

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# INTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP: POTENTIALITIES AND CHALLENGES

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# PRESENTATION

The themes of *interculturality*, *synodality*, and the *abuse of power* are the subject of this Bulletin N. 179.

These are themes that challenge consecrated life to be present, sustaining, and prophetic where women and men seek release from poverty and fear.

These are also areas that offer the leaders of religious institutes the chance to walk together and collaborate in unison. Thus they can make an effective contribution and create a valid alternative to the indifference and egotism that increasingly mark today's society, and thereby furnish a visible sign of witness to the Gospel and transparency of God as we help to construct the Kingdom.

**Interculturality, Leadership and Vows: Liability or Richness.**
***Sr. Patricia Murray, IBVM***

Amid the growing diversity in religious life leadership must ask "are there brothers and sisters among us who whisper and even shout "I can't breathe, we can't breathe" because they feel marginalized culturally? Are we not called to examine the radical implications of what it means to live as an intercultural community? How are leaders to lead an exploration of the meaning of the vows in today's multicultural world? Are we not being called "to discover the dignity of difference and celebrate it?" If we can demonstrate to the world that we who are culturally diverse can live and work together, then we can be a prophetic sign of hope in today's world.

**Potential Challenges for Interculturality in African Society and Religious Life**
***Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF***

In identifying the dynamics of intercultural living, it is vital to understand and acknowledge culture not just as what makes us different, but as the common denominator – because no person is without culture. Intercultural training will undoubtedly help women religious to learn ways to cultivate healthy relationships and together build intercultural communities but learning alone will not transform these communities. Members of the communities will be required to have intentionality, tolerance of ambiguity, mistakes, a forum for venting frustrations without judgment, appropriate correction, and genuine attentive listening, encouragement, and compassion.

**Synodality in the Catholic Church**
***Sr. Anne Béatrice Faye, CIC***

Today, the voice of the Church is composed of many different voices and the Synod is a time of grace where the unified and coherent message is diversity and plurality. In other words, synodality is about discerning how the Spirit moves through and with the Body of Christ, so that we can continue to fulfill our mission of evangelization in the world. In this context, this Synod is relevant to discerning needed reforms in the Church.

**Naming the Unnamed.**
**What Is Conducive to Abuses of Power and Conscience in Consecrated Life?**
***Ianire Angulo Ordorika, ESSE***

In Religious Life, as such, there is a breeding ground for abuses of power and conscience. This statement does not imply that they occur *per se*, but rather that in this vocation there are circumstances that are much more conducive to it than in other areas or in other ways of following Jesus Christ. In what follows, we will briefly explain these elements that interrelate and facilitate such abusive situations. To do this, we will divide them into specific elements of Religious Life, specific elements of individuals, and elements that concern group dynamics.

**Changes in Canon Law dealing with Abuse**
***Fr. Benoît Malvaux, SJ***

The revision of Book 6 of the code of Canon Law, which deals with criminal law and its consequences in the matter of abuse, is a complex question that I am going to attempt to present in as clear a fashion as possible. First, I shall locate this revision within the context of the evolution of thinking in the Church as regards criminal law. Next, I shall present the new norms regarding abuses and the penalties with which they are sanctioned. Lastly, I shall offer some brief personal thoughts regarding the implementation of the new system.

# INTERCULTURALITY, LEADERSHIP AND VOWS: LIABILITY OR RICHNESS

Sr. Patricia Murray, IBVM

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An extraordinary confluence of events is currently reshaping our world. Social and cultural landscapes are shifting, as a new consciousness spreads worldwide. Years ago, Alvin Toffler commented that humanity was facing a quantum leap forward with the deepest social upheaval and restructuring of all time. He said "without clearly recognizing it, we are engaged in building a remarkable new civilization from the ground up."[1] What is happening now is certainly part of that upheaval. Religious don't live outside of today's context – it affects who we are and who we are becoming as consecrated men and women. Only if we engage in critically examining our lives in the light of these "signs of our times" can we judge whether inculturation, leadership and vows are a liability or a richness.

Early in 2020 a new viral infection called covid-19, or disparagingly "the Chinese flu;" or "Kung flu,"began spreading from Wuhan, China. Social commentators noted that "wherever a pandemic goes, xenophobia is never far behind….Disease, after all, fosters fear, which in turn fosters discrimination."[2] Various studies provide clear evidence that black and minority ethnic groups are at a higher risk of dying from Covid-19 than people of white ethnicity. Experts point to racism as a fundamental cause of this differential because it "restricts access to education and employment opportunities."[3] These factors in addition "lead to poorer socioeconomic circumstances which lead to poorer health outcomes."[4] In addition people from black or other ethnic minorities work in greater numbers in "es-

sential jobs," live in over-crowded accommodation, have underlying health issues, thus putting them at even greater risk.

The world was further jolted by the senseless killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, USA. As videos of the event emerged and were replayed, we watched a man die, "face down on the pavement, pinned beneath a car, and above him another man, a man in uniform, his skin lighter than the man on the ground… his knee boring into the neck of the darker man… The man on the ground went silent, drained of breath."[5] These 8 minutes and 46 seconds galvanized millions of people to take to the streets proclaiming "I/We can't breathe"; "Black Lives Matter." They represent people of every age, gender, ethnicity, race and religion united in solidarity, anger and grief with this one man but also with every person who suffers discrimination, stereotyping, racism, xenophobia and exclusion of any kind.

Increased mobility, transnational travel, a globalized market place, refugees fleeing wars and conflicts, migrants seeking better opportunities, have shown the ugly face of exclusion. Now personal transformation and conversion of attitudes, symbols and systems are being demanded. These global happenings have placed a mirror to the face of our global society and to contemporary religious life. Recently Jayne Helmlinger CSJ, acknowledging her own complicity in racism because of white privilege, called on women religious to undertake "the pilgrimage into the terrain of racism….not leaving too quickly, crossing back to a place of comfort and protection."[6] Worldwide the focus is clearly on how to manage difference and diversity. This is a challenge that must be faced by both society as a whole and by leadership within religious life.

A recent Vatican document notes the enormous change that has occurred where "female congregations have passed from almost entirely monocultural contexts to the challenge of multiculturalism."[7] The face of religious life reflects a "labyrinth of cultures."[8]. Younger male and female religious live in multi-cultural communities or participate in networks of communion and mutual support that are "culturally, ethnically, theologically and ecclesiologically diverse."[9] This recent evolution within and across many congregations "has made the challenge of integrating different cultures even more acute."[10] The same document notes that

Some institutes now find themselves in a situation that is hard to manage. On the one hand, a few dozen elderly members who are tied to the classic and sometimes altered cultural and institutional traditions, and on the other side a large number of young members from different cultures who tremble, who feel marginalized and who no longer accept subordinate roles.[11]

It notes the de-westernization of consecrated life keeping pace with the process of globalization.[12] It says that what is essential "is not the preservation of forms" but the willingness "in creative continuity to rethink the consecrated life as the evangelical memory of a permanent state of conversion."[13] During a recent online meeting the leader of one religious congregation posed the question "what does religious life look like when it doesn't have the overlay of western civilization?"[14] How should we understand the vows from a different perspective? Many leaders are educating themselves about different aspects of culture so that they may lead well and wisely.

The increased membership from new cultures together with declining vocations from traditional sources has changed the cultural composition of religious congregations. Newer members can experience overt or covert prejudice, generalizations, stereotypical judgments and reciprocal misunderstandings. This can be further compounded by a generation gap or personality differences. Criticism of individuals or groups can often circulate in an underhand manner creating an unhealthy atmosphere. There can be fear

of being dominated by the majority group. If it is perceived that congregational resources such as power, money, relationships of solidarity with the families of members and hospitality are distributed unevenly, trust is deeply affected. Despite these experiences conversations rarely take place around differences and the issue of racism and prejudice are almost never addressed openly. Members practice a double approach: "In the presence of members from the 'other' culture, we emphasise the positive…but when we are with those of our own culture, it is all the negatives (about the other culture) that emerge."[15] In the well-known iceberg picture of culture nine tenths of what constitutes a culture is under the surface. Leaders need to consider that conscious and unconscious processes exist culturally at individual and organizational levels.

How then to exercise leadership amid this growing cultural diversity? Leaders need to lead deeper conversations which will call for a radical change of mind and heart. If religious life is to mirror the enormous cultural shifts that are taking place both in our world and within congregations, there is an increasing need to pay attention to the anthropologies of various cultures and to learn the language of culture. It is clear that "a ministry to lead that can solicit real synodality by fostering a dynamism of synergy is becoming ever more necessary."[16] Amid the growing diversity in religious life leadership must ask "are there brothers and sisters among us who whisper and even shout "I can't breathe, we can't breathe" because they feel marginalized culturally? Are we not called to examine the radical implications of what it means to live as an intercultural community? How are leaders to lead an exploration of the meaning of the vows in today's multicultural world? Are we not being called "to discover the dignity of difference and celebrate it?"[17] If we can demonstrate to the world that we who are culturally diverse can live and work together, then we can be a prophetic sign of hope in today's world.

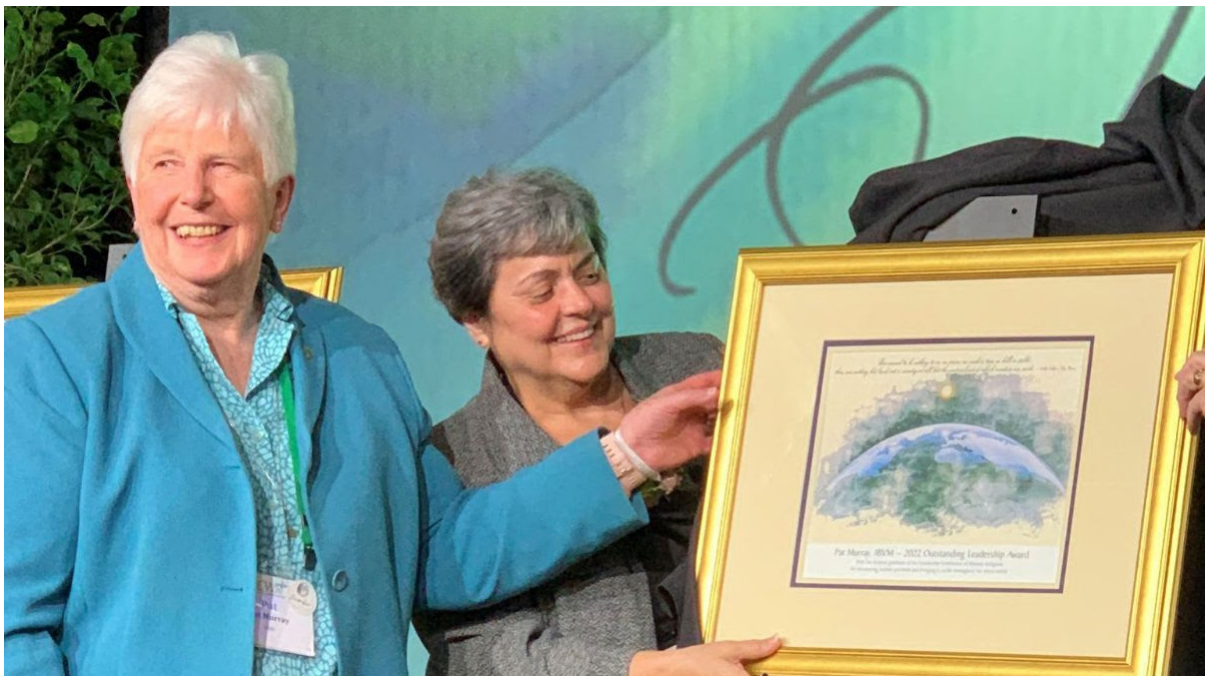
**Leadership in a Multicultural World.**

How then to lead amid growing difference and diversity? Organizational theorists affirm that leaders who undertake a voyage of personal understanding and development, can transform not only their own capabilities but also those of others and of their organizations.[18] Transformative leaders are individuals who are able to "identify their inner core or higher self which can effectively guide them through turbulent times."[19] However without a personal process that develops the person's capacity for perception, for learning, for interiorization, for explicit sense-making and for constructing meaning, such transformative leadership is impossible.[20] Where there is good leadership there must be a vision – an articulation of a purpose "that is worth the rest of your life."[21] Men and women who are leaders in religious congregations are therefore being called to motivate their members to the Gospel values and attitudes that are needed in today's intercultural world? These must include empathy, openness to the other, mutual sharing and enrichment, hospitality, encountering and welcoming the stranger, inclusion, respect for the other, understanding and celebrating difference, and developing deep connectedness. When these attitudes and values flourish in congregational members they will in turn influence ministry outreach. But first leaders must undertake a journey of personal discovery. Only then can they challenge others 'to commit to live similarly….championing a new way of leading in our culture."[22]

One of the first challenges for leadership is to understand the dynamics of culture. This is a very complex task, like peeling an onion. Culture describes everything that makes a large group of people unique. It has been compared to the air we breathe, which we really only notice when it is absent. Culture is seen as a "set of norms according to which things are run or simply "are" in a particular society, country or organization."[23]

A culture can be examined externally (etic) or internally (emic).[24] A person's cultural identity develops over time and has been defined as "identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct."[25] It means that a person can function appropriately within the culture, understanding the systems of symbols and beliefs and following norms. People who are socialized into different cultures react differently to the same set of circumstances, because of previously internalized conceptions of what is normal and what is appropriate. So, there isn't one way of reacting and as people from different cultures meet, they have to continually learn the appropriate cultural responses of new acquaintances.

Any review of contemporary writing on interculturality notes that this term encompasses the "theology, practice and spirituality of prophetic dialogue."[26] At the practical level, missiologist Anthony Gittins has written extensively on how from a community of many cultures, genuine interculturality will only emerge, when a new culture is created through



intentional, honest and creative exchanges on the part of all the members. In addition, a religious community needs to "bear public witness to the real possibility of people of different cultures and languages but a common faith and vision being able to survive and thrive for a purpose beyond any whim or comfort and a sign of the Kingdom and Reign of God."[27] To engage in the process of interculturality a person must be open to being transformed by people from other cultures. Sometimes this process has been reduced to a superficial sharing of food, an exchange of symbols or the celebration of national holidays. To be genuine the process must involve sharing at a much deeper level. It means making "more explicit the essential mutuality of the process of inculturation on both the personal and social level."[28] This means being open to listen to the feelings, fears and struggles of the other, facing real cultural tensions and inequalities together. It involves learning how to express negative feelings and misunderstandings towards one another. The missiologist, Aylward Shorter invites us to begin our intercultural learning by first believing "…in the positive character of other cultures," then by nurturing "the desire to

be enriched by them." Finally we must "welcome those of other cultures and give them (our) unreserved trust.[29]" To understand and respect another person's culture is to affirm another person's identity and acknowledge his/her dignity. When mutual respect and understanding is cultivated this helps to build trust and openness, enrich intercultural communication and create a truly intercultural community.

**The Intercultural challenge of the vowed life**

Leaders must begin by asking to what extent our globalized multicultural world is reshaping the theology of religious life. Are new insights about the vowed life emerging? Prior to the Vatican Council vowed religious life was seen in terms of individual commitment, "No one who puts his(her) hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."[30] The congregational culture of the vows privileged "I-ness" (an individualist culture) even though members lived in community. Scriptural quotations such as "anyone who

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loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"[31] were used to construct systems and structures that created distance between vowed religious and their families, local communities and wider world. Consecrated life was seen as a withdrawal from the world. Vatican II created a new awareness that the Church and by extension religious life must be "in, with and for the world, participating in its struggle for the transformation of humankind."[32] Congregations began a renewal process asking how "the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses" could respond "to the signs of the times emerging in today's world."[33] However the process of renewal and adaptation has not been an easy one.

We must not be afraid to honestly acknowledge how, despite a series of changes, the old institutional framework struggles to give way to new models in a decisive manner. Perhaps the entire constellation of languages and models, values and duties, spirituality and ecclesial identity that we are used to has not yet left room for the testing and stabili-

zing of the new paradigm born of inspiration and post-conciliar practice. [34]

There is a renewed call for reflection on what is required today if religious are to be a prophetic presence and a counter-cultural witness inspired by evangelical values. There is a growing awareness that vows lived communally (WE-ness or collectivist in cultural terms) can be a significant prophetic witness. Through their vows religious dedicate themselves to the person of Christ and then personally and communally commit themselves to the transformation of all aspects of human life. Sandra Schneiders demonstrates how the vows focus specifically on three important dimensions of personal life – possessions, affectivity and power which are simultaneously the three major areas of human interaction which structure the world (economics, social life and politics). We have already seen how these three fields impact on different cultures contributing to poverty, exclusion and discrimination. Therefore, a contemporary theology of the vows must highlight "the potential of the vows for enabling the religious to play a significant role in the transformation of the very structures of the world"[35] particularly in the creation of a new intercultural way of living together.

**The Vow of Poverty:** The vow of poverty is a commitment to bear witness to an alternative way of living in a world where there is a sharp divide between an economy of abundance and one of scarcity. There are two dimensions to the vow of poverty – one societal and the other personal.[36] The societal dimension requires religious congregations to contribute "to the restructuring of the economic situation on a worldwide scale."[37] This is done by committing resources to meeting the needs of the materially disadvantaged, by engaging in advocacy on behalf of the poor and demanding structural change. The personal dimension calls religious to witness to "inner freedom and simplicity" and to "the evangelical freedom lived by Christ who enriches us through his poverty"[38] The vow calls for a balanced relationship with material goods, acknowledging everything as a gift from God; therefore "we religious have no right to more than we need when another is in need."[39] It calls for a conversion of heart that will change behavior in relation to materials goods and possessions.

Religious are to denounce selfishness, exploitation, domination and "to model a sharing of life through the sharing of goods."[40] The vow calls for responsible stewardship and global solidarity. It is lived out in attitudes and behaviors which bear witness to "contentment and thanksgiving, detachment of heart, works well done, trust in providence, respect and solidarity with the poor."[41] Hospitality and radical welcome are hallmarks of this vowed commitment. It must be shown that there is room at the table for each person no matter their culture or ethnicity, their age or gender, their religion or their political beliefs, for all are welcome.

Today, many religious come from contexts and cultures where millions grapple with absolute poverty. Families may live in poverty while their sons and daughters who profess a vow of poverty are well provided for. These religious have access to resources and opportunities that might not be possible otherwise. Membership of a religious community can give a person access to an "intellectual and professional formation and lifestyle that are the fruit of an almost Western preparation."[42] Family members don't always understand that the consecrated person does not have independent access to the material goods of the religious congregation. They have expectations that the religious will help them financially or help them find benefactors. Being a religious however does not absolve a person from family obligations. It must be clear that it is the community rather than the individual that is responding to what is expected culturally of a family member when a death occurs or when celebrating important family occasions.

Leaders need to lead reflection with members on this tension between poverty as a lived

reality and poverty as a vowed commitment. Sandra Schneiders points out that the real difference "between the truly poor and people who choose a poor lifestyle is precisely that the latter choose it, and they can unchoose it, if things become too difficult."[43] She believes that it is only when our options evaporate that we can experience solidarity with the poor, "not the conspicuous solidarity of chosen deprivations but the real solidarity of fellow-sufferers in a world we do not control and cannot change."[44] Leaders need to help members to explore how to respond appropriately within different cultural contexts to the needs around them in ways that makes the living of the vow of poverty credible.

**Vow of Celibacy:** Consecrated celibacy is seen as a gift of God to the individual and by extension to the Church and the people among whom the religious lives and ministers. Through the vow of celibacy, a person makes a lifelong commitment, signifying a personal relationship with God and availability to promote God's Reign. Sacrificing the opportunity to marry is not easy but it frees religious to engage fully in socially transformative ministries. However, in some cultural contexts although celibacy has existed for centuries this consecration was to the deity, the ruler or the spirits. Life is seen as a gift from God and a guarantee of the group's continuity therefore "the person who deliberately refused to transmit it or who was incapable of transmitting life was considered as a useless link in the evolutionary chain."[45] Every culture has its own understanding of fecundity and fruitfulness and for some the commitment of a son or a daughter to the priesthood or religious life can pose great difficulties. On the one hand there is the issue of the continuance of the family or tribe and on the other hand the future obligation of children to take care of their parents and members of their extended family in their old age. While these obligations have been somewhat weakened through contact with Western values, they are deeply embedded cultural responsibilities within the young men and women who join religious life. Any exploration of the vow of chastity needs to deal with issues about life, fecundity and fruitfulness and familial obligations and how these are to be re-interpreted in contemporary religious life?

The essence of the vow of chastity calls for openness to "interpersonal and community relationships of an affectivity that has been radically healed, purified and liberated."[46] Personal and communal prayer helps to develop the ability to create relationships even with those with whom we do not find an immediate affinity.[47] Celibacy for the sake of the Gospel calls for inclusivity and diversity when developing relationships. It is a commitment to live a life of expansive and inclusive love of humanity. This doesn't happen naturally and is a particular challenge in parts of the world where cultural differences have caused division and hostility. Fostering mutually enriching relationships across our differences is a profound counter-cultural prophetic expression of God's reign. Most people having grown up within a certain group "have assimilated its rules and expectations… and become relatively ethnocentric."[48]

A person's ability to include others, depends on the ability to engage in honest conversation about difficult topics such as ethnocentrism, racism, discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping and any other barriers which prevent us from stepping in the shoes of the other. In addition, a community of religious whose members have vowed celibacy needs to have the flexibility "to extend its boundaries to take into consideration another group's experience and context."[49] It means stepping outside of our safety zone and stretching our boundaries. Inclusion is complicated, multi-layered, time-consuming….involving a great deal of thinking and listening to others.[50] Jesus was concerned with the inclusion of the weak, the outcasts and the outsiders. He continually asked his followers to connect with the compassionate God whose mercy and loving kindness made space for each one and for all. This is a crucial aspect of the vow of celibacy.

**The Vow of Obedience:** Our understanding of obedience has changed radically since Vatican II. Prior to the Council, congregations were structured hierarchically where some members "were thought to be intrinsically, personally and relatively superior to the others."[51] However it is important to note that "what worked in a pyramidal and authoritative relational context is no longer desirable or livable in the sensitivity of communion of our way feeling like and wanting to be a Church."[52] The participative model which has since emerged acknowledges the fundamental equality of all and "a growing sense of the inalienability of personal responsibility."[53] When individuals are now appointed to specific leadership roles within religious communities this position is now understood to be "provisional, temporary, limited in scope, functional and above all "secular" in the sense of non-sacralized."[54] This change in model puts the emphasis on collegiality in the search of God's will in and through personal and communal discernment.

The vow of obedience is now understood as "a dedication to freedom and not to subjection or servitude."[55] Making a vow of obedience commits a person to "a personal quest for freedom and holiness in a community context."[56] It requires each member to openly share his or her own convictions and insights obtained through discernment. However, it is important to acknowledge that in certain cultures and contexts the exercise of authority "still shows a tendency towards the vertical concentration of the exercise of authority, on both the local and higher levels."[57]

When leaders set out to engage members in discernment, they need to consider how relationships and participation operate within different cultures. This can influence how leaders are likely to lead and individual members are likely to participate in discernment processes. Geert Hofstede has demonstrated how some cultures demonstrate a "high power distance" with a markedly authoritarian and hierarchical structure. Here people believe that power and influence are concentrated in the hands of a few and are highly

centralized. Members are comfortable with having a distance between those who have power and influence and those governed. Respect is paid to a person of higher status and "there is a pattern of dependence on seniors which pervades all human contacts, and the mental software which people carry contains a strong need for such dependence."[58]

Obedience towards superiors is highly valued. Members from "high power distance" cultures are likely to show so much respect for those in authority that they may find it difficult to offer alternative opinions. In addition, any loss of face or feelings of shame can impede communication and the development of a relationship.

In other cultures where people feel that they are relatively equal and have the same rights, they feel uncomfortable with an unequal distribution of power. If they become members of congregations with a "high power distance" structure they are likely to be seen as argumentative when they offer suggestions which differ to those in authority. In cultures which demonstrate "low power distance" members believe that the function

**Understanding power dynamics and the complex dynamics of intercultural communication are key for the growth of relationships within a multicultural religious community.**

of leadership is to facilitate the participation of as many as possible, in order to build a consensus or to reach a compromise. Members feel free to offer suggestions and to voice their opposition publicly to plans and projects being considered. Knowing how cultural power distance has shaped long established patterns of participation is essential if leaders and members are to create processes where each person can participate freely, without judgment.

When speaking about discernment Pope Francis highlighted the fact that "discernment is a choice of courage" and "to educate in discernment means "to expose" oneself, to go out of the world of one's convictions and prejudices to open oneself to understand how God is speaking to us today, in this world, in this time, in this moment."[59] To do this together means understanding how culture affects the actual dynamics of communication in order to avoid misunderstandings. Interculturalists have demonstrated how members from low and high context cultures communicate in different ways. Edmund Hall[60] has

termed a high-context culture communication or message as "one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit transmitted parts of the message."[61] When communicating with another person something which is on her mind, a person from a high-context culture may appear silent and taciturn. Instead he/she expects the interlocutor to interpret what is being communicated and therefore he/she will not explain in great detail. By contrast a low context communication is the direct opposite. The information is in the explicit code, and the verbal messages are "elaborate, highly specific, detailed and redundant."[62]

In addition, in some cultures, if opinions offered are ignored or trivialized a loss of face and shame is experienced. If leaders and members don't understand the complex dynamics of intercultural communication, then communal discernment becomes difficult. We need to recognize that all have a part to play in discerning the collective truth. A discerning group allows the truth to be born "from the womb of the whole"[63] recognizing that everyone must help shape that truth.

**Richness or Liability:**

Any consideration of the Interplay between interculturality, leadership and vows needs to acknowledge where human flourishing occurs (the riches entailed) and where problematic areas lie (the liabilities encountered). It is increasingly clear that leadership holds the key to the personal and communal growth that can occur when the vows are explored through the lens of culture. However, the leader must first of all undertake a personal journey, one which will involve study and reflection from an intercultural and theological perspective. If this personal exploration is avoided, leadership is likely to continue to present an understanding of the vowed life that has emerged from a dominant ethnocentric cultural perspective. The meaning of the vows will seem frozen in time and prove irrelevant in new cultural contexts. The deeper meaning of such cherished cultural values as unbounded hospitality, filial and communal responsibilities, reciprocity and practical solidarity need to be continually contextualized and embedded within the vowed life. In this way the rich meaning of the vowed life is continually being rearticulated in new realities. Examining the vows through the lens of culture offers new invitations for personal and communal conversion. It creates a mutually enriching exchange for members of congregations and sharpens the prophetic impact of personal and community living in relation to local and global contexts. Without this ongoing reflection and reinterpretation religious life could be in danger of losing its vibrancy. The outcome could lead to a loss of meaning and significance and the continued imposition of historic understandings and practices that burden newer members.

Leadership has an important role to play in facilitating the development of prophetic intercultural communities. A deeper appreciation of the complexity of culture can help members reinterpret the meaning of the vowed life from an intercultural perspective. Various studies indicate that currently most cultural awareness happens on a trial-and-error basis and not by undertaking a serious study of culture. These studies also note that inaccurate knowledge gleaned on a trial and error basis can often have negative results leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. Leaders need to make sure that education for intercultural living and ministry is an integral part of both initial and ongoing formation. With this awareness members can then engage in honest conversations about critical topics. This increases interpersonal understanding, develops mutually enriching relationships, and ultimately enriches communal discernment. Where this knowledge and these processes are absent members will continue to relate in ethnocentric ways, unaware of mistakes made, hurt caused and opportunities for growth missed.

Finally, leaders need to understand how cultural differences affect how members view relationships with authority figures. Where this understanding exists, leaders adapt their approaches when engaging in personal and group communication and developing processes that encourage maximum participation by members from different cultures. Understanding power dynamics and the complex dynamics of intercultural communication are key for the growth of relationships within a multicultural religious community. Members with adequate cultural knowledge and insight, are enabled to build bridges of mutuality that are a prophetic witness in societies marked by division.

As members of religious congregations open up and listen to one another they realize that all "are summoned to the same table where God feeds us not only with the familiar food and spirits but also with the new and untried food and spirits of God's most recent revelation."[64] In an interview with a journalist in 2007, Pope Francis remarked that "fidelity is always a change, a blossoming, a growth." Effecting change within an organization requires a cultural shift. Firstly, the cultural shift has to be named by leadership and then actualized. The increased multicultural nature of religious life calls for a shift in imagination and understanding at every level. Enlightened leadership will engage all of the members to "follow the lights within the group to the edge of tomorrow rather than the preservation of yesterday."[65]

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# POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FOR INTERCULTURALITY IN AFRICAN SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

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**Cultural and Intercultural Context**

I am aware that Africa is not a monoculture or homogeneous continent. In fact, each country consists of an array of diversity in cultural practices, languages, skin color, and belief systems. To illustrate this diversity, think about the population and ethnicity in your country. Nigeria, for example, is estimated to have a population of 214 million people[1] with over 250 ethnic groups, and Egypt with 105 million people[2] and over 80 ethnic groups. Rich cultural and linguistic diversity is also present within each nation's institutions, congregations, and religious communities. Each of the individuals in these communities is unique and brings cultural experiences, values, and talents that help create a montage of beautiful perspectives and interdependencies. That diversity can also bring challenges, conflicts, and stereotypes. *I invite you for a minute to pause, reflect and identify the types of diversity you recognize in your community – ethnic, racial background, age, and disability. What challenges have you experienced in your interactions with diverse people and cultures?*

**Acknowledging My Personal Cultural Limitations**

I enter this dialogue aware of my background, experiences, and limitations. I was born and raised in Kenya, where I attended school through my undergraduate studies. I encountered a diverse range of individuals, students, and teachers at my school, church, and the local communities where I lived. These interactions shaped my perceptions -- how I interpret realities in my life. Looking back, I recognize noticeable yet unconscious

stereotypic undertones in my thinking around ethnic/tribal communities. I recall some tribes were labeled based on unfounded stereotypes of weaknesses, including that groups were thought of as loud, lazy, or unable to manage their anger. Other tribes were labeled with positive attributes, thought to be hardworking, businesslike, and wealthy, more likely to be scholars and lawyers. These labels differentiated and identified the "otherness" of specific groups. Labels like these can also be present in our religious communities – for example, when individuals are careful to introduce their origin (East, West, North, South), they want to ensure they stand out and have allies and that there is no confusion about their background. Unfairly, these labels can determine the "ingroup" and "outgroup" – for example, who might be eligible or ineligible for a job offer or a promotion.

Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to live and work in a variety of places and with many people of diverse ethnicities, national origins, age ranges, and racial groups. For the past 20+ years, I have lived in two international communities with members from Croatia, the United States, Korea, India, Indonesia, Poland, and Kenya. I have also traveled extensively and lived in many communities in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the US. While these experiences have enriched me, I can't claim that I am an expert in interculturality. However, my travels and living arrangements have helped me relate to others in a unique way, and grow in my intercultural understanding. Through my journey, I have developed some thoughts on harmonious engagement and working well with people and groups of diverse cultures. Indeed, I am still a work in progress, and I believe you too are.

**Defining Terms**

I would first like to define some terminologies that are used interchangeably but have various meanings: Multicultural, international, and intercultural.

These are interrelated yet distinct terms that I will use consistently in this conversation. "Intercultural living" is different from international or multicultural communities. *International* applies to people from other nationalities living together. And *multicultural* signifies people living together who are not differentiated by national origin, but by their culture/cultural backgrounds.

The mere words *international* and *multicultural* do not adequately explain the intentional quality of the relationships and engagements that are fostered in these communities – the words simply define the context. "Intercultural living", however, allows for the nuance of an intentional inner working of the spirit to transform members' lives towards recognition, appreciation, and living in harmony with each other.

**Jesus, Teacher of Culture and Interculturality**

Through cultural encounters, we are invited to learn while being attentive to our own implicit bias. We are given an opportunity to resist interpreting events – and other people's experiences and circumstances – from the perspective of our own culture and experience. Geert Hofstede, a renowned researcher on culture in organizations, explains that "culture is the software of the mind." It is through culture that we interpret other people's experiences; looking at them through our own cultural lenses – and often label them and put them in the boxes we have created in our own minds. By doing so, we close the door of opportunity to build relationships and get to know people as individuals. Sadly, this happens too often in our communities and in our places of work; and is further perpetuated through local, national, regional, and global political conversations.

We have much to learn from Jesus's story in Mark 2:1-12. It is about Jesus's return to Capernaum and the cure of the paralytic man. This scriptural passage explains that people gathered in large numbers to listen to Jesus, and a paralytic man was brought forth and lowered from the rooftop, with the request that Jesus cure him. Listen to the following conversation and determine if there are such conversations in your Institute:

> "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "S*on, your sins are forgiven." Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?*
>
> Mk 2:5-9.

Even in Jesus's act of compassion – of giving new life to the paralytic man – the teachers of the law found wrongdoing in his actions. They were more concerned about cultural practice than about true benevolence. And although many people were gathered, they did not form a cohesive intercultural community. Rather, they had a mindset that focused on their differences. *What are the barriers we confront when we look at those who are different in our communities?* Think about age references and the young described to as a new generation with minimal formation or no experience.

As women religious, our prophetic witness invites us to recognize and embrace one another's differences through action; however, occasionally, we fall short in embodying the true spirit of interculturality. Interculturality refers to equitable interactions among diverse cultures, in such a way that those interactions generate shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect.[3] Through such interactions and encounters, a dynamic process evolves by the co-construction of a new culture. This happens through the negotiation of meaning, attitudes, and perspectives. Conversations allow members to find and build commonalities, and to express their identities without judgment or fear. The result is healthy and life-giving relationships – not the assimilation of some cultures by the dominant culture.

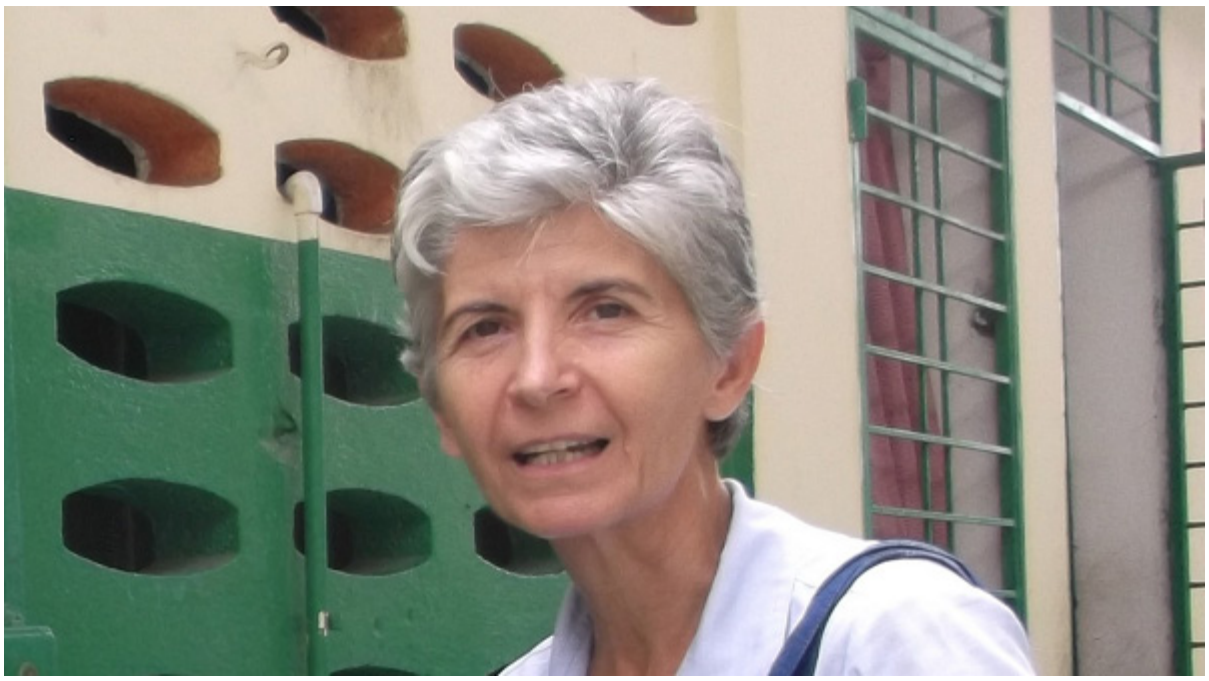
As women religious, we are inherently well-positioned to grow in interculturality through the virtues of faith, humility, and love; and to open our hearts to a deeper understanding of diverse encounters. With a keen awareness and a recognition of the dignity of every individual, through our actions, we can foster a sense of mutuality – an encouragement for those in our communities to give to and receive from each other – and build positive relationships. Our openness, born of our deep respect for the dignity of every person, leads us to trust the "other". With that trust, intercultural transformation starts to take root in a multicultural or international community – and helps seed wonderful and lifegiving relationships.

We see this clearly in the Scripture. When Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman, he enters a dialogue with her and invites her toward him: "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman's response illustrates her bias around cultural difference; she is keenly aware of Jesus' "otherness". The reason for her response is explained in John 4:9-10.

"The Samaritan woman said to him (Jesus), "*What? You are a Jew, and you ask me, a Samaritan for a drink? Jews, in fact, do not associate with the Samaritans. Jesus replied (pushing on to*

*get into the real issue): If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water."*

In this encounter, Jesus demonstrates humility by taking the first step to invite the Samaritan woman to give him water. In that gesture, he cultivates intercultural communication. Notice that inner courage is essential to take the first step towards breaking the barrier. The "no" from the woman is not satisfactory to Jesus, because transformation occurs through identifying and pushing past underlying cultural undertones. Jesus bridges the cultural barrier perpetuated in the region that separated Jews and Samaritans. Further, Jesus explains to the woman what God is offering: life-giving water that bridges all barriers and differences.



To transform our communities from multicultural or international communities to true "intercultural living", we must name the divergences we see; including challenges, stereotypes, conflicts, power, and other barriers that hinder us from building bridges to meaningful relationships in our encounters. Ultimately, through intercultural communication, the Samaritan woman does not feel threatened by Jesus's invitation. As a result, she engages in the conversation, and that conversation results in her conversion, a fraternal relationship grows, and she becomes a true disciple of Jesus.

*What cultural practices separate us from each other in our communities? What stereotypes are perpetuated in your communities? What steps do we take to bridge barriers of intercultural awareness and practices in our communities?*

Renowned intercultural scholar Fr. Anthony Gittins explains that intercultural living is a faith-based and lifelong process of conversion. Gittins beautifully offers that

"Intercultural living depends on the members' commitment and support from each other for individuals to adopt and generate positive engagement, openness to learning, listening, and willingness to change.[4]" This process is the work of the spirit moving within and around community members to intentionally open and become vulnerable, listen, and take action for personal and community transformation.

Now let's to some of the challenges that inhibit intercultural living.

**Challenges of Interculturality in Africa**

As noted earlier, Africa is rich in culture and practices. Culture develops through human interaction and is created and maintained through human communication.[5] I define culture as an organized system of meaning-making that sets the context for everything people have and do as members of society. Traditionally, the culture of ethnic/tribal

**The journey to intercultural living exposes our vulnerability and calls us to embrace humility, mercy, and a pure heart; and to become peacemakers.**

groups centered around the family, expressed in art, music, and oral literature. African philosophers such as John Mbiti explain that Africans viewed life as one big whole, and religion permeated all aspects of life. Regardless of the influence of modernism in Africa, today, religion plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic and political life of the people.[6] Also, African proverbs such as "it takes a village to raise a child" illuminate African culture's richness, communal aspects, and the value of children and family. The scholarly work of Archbishop Desmond Tutu underscores meaningful relationships that exist in African communities, for which he uses a term common in many African countries: *Ubuntu*. Tutu defines Ubuntu as a belief that "a person is a person through other persons, interpreted as my humanity is caught up, bound up, intimately, with yours. And when I dehumanize you, I inevitably dehumanize myself."[7] Ubuntu exemplifies true humanism and relationality, and thus provides a core foundation for interculturality.

Yet, despite that advantage, challenges abound. I would like to speak to nine of the most critical challenges prevalent in our society and communities.

**First, the challenge of tribal dominance**. If Africans embody ubuntu, why are some community members categorized as an outgroup? Interestingly, large ethnic/tribal groups assume authority in leadership and power in politics, churches, organizations, and congregations. The dominant culture subsumes and minimizes the minority ethnic group practices. Such domination results in distress, alienation, and resentment. While this is generally perceived as pertinent in the social or political arena, it is also common in religious Institutes. For example, in Institute Chapters, minority group representation tends to be minimal or nonexistent, and lobbying for leadership is almost always aligned according to ethnic or geographic origins. Consistently electing leaders from the same ethnic group who put forth their particular agenda for the entire congregation could impact the congregation negatively. In addition, some leaders refuse to step down upon completing their chapter mandate – parallel to political leaders who perceive themselves as irreplaceable regardless of having constitutions and transition processes in place. We are invited to endow a different type of leadership. I draw the definition of leadership from Robert K. Greenleaf, who studied a variety of congregations, seminaries, and church leadership systems. He coined the term "servant leadership" – a type of leadership that emerges from within an individual's desire to serve, to care, and to meet the diverse needs of their people.[8]

Servant leadership begins with a natural feeling in an individual to want to serve; and then, a conscious choice to aspire to lead. *Is this the type of leadership that we see in our communities? What motivates leaders in our communities*? *Have you witnessed issues with Institute leaders who want to remain in leadership forever, or believe that leadership should remain in their ethnic/tribal ingroup?*

**Second, the challenge of intentional or implicit biases**. Biases during appointments or reassignment to ministerial work, further studies, and lucrative projects are prevalent in communities and African society in general – and this is common too in political offices and churches. At times, it seems like favoritism and nepotism are acceptable in operations. Often appointments are made through ethnic lines or friendship and not because of individual capacity, talent, and service of the mission of the Institute of a diocese. Some individuals elected to leadership describe the opportunity to serve as "our time to eat, let them wait for their turn." Intentional intercultural living invites members to embrace true discernment in institute elections and operations. *What ethnic alliances exist in your Institutes? What is the process of appointments for apostolic work or further studies? Who are the ingroup and outgroup in your communities?*

**Third, the challenge of recruiting.** I have interacted with sisters who have explained the challenges in the process of recruiting women to enter religious institutes. There can be a tendency for those who serve as vocation promoters and formators to represent specific cultures, ethnic or tribal groups. While recruiting girls from diverse ethnic groups is beneficial to Institutes, some ministries, organizations, and formation houses are dominated by certain ethnic groups. Sometimes there is even intentional marginalization of minority groups in recruitment efforts, to ensure a large proportion of members belong to certain preferred geographies, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds. And if women from diverse tribes enter in the formation, it is common knowledge that they will never make it to take their vows. It is not because they don't have the vocation, but implicit

biases take the front seat. Young women from minority ethnicities or nationalities who explore religious life are treated as an outgroup – and so too often they end up leaving. *Are there processes in place for recruiting and representing diversity in the formation house? Representation is one thing, but is there intentional engagement in the service of intercultural living? Or, is there only insistence on assimilation?*

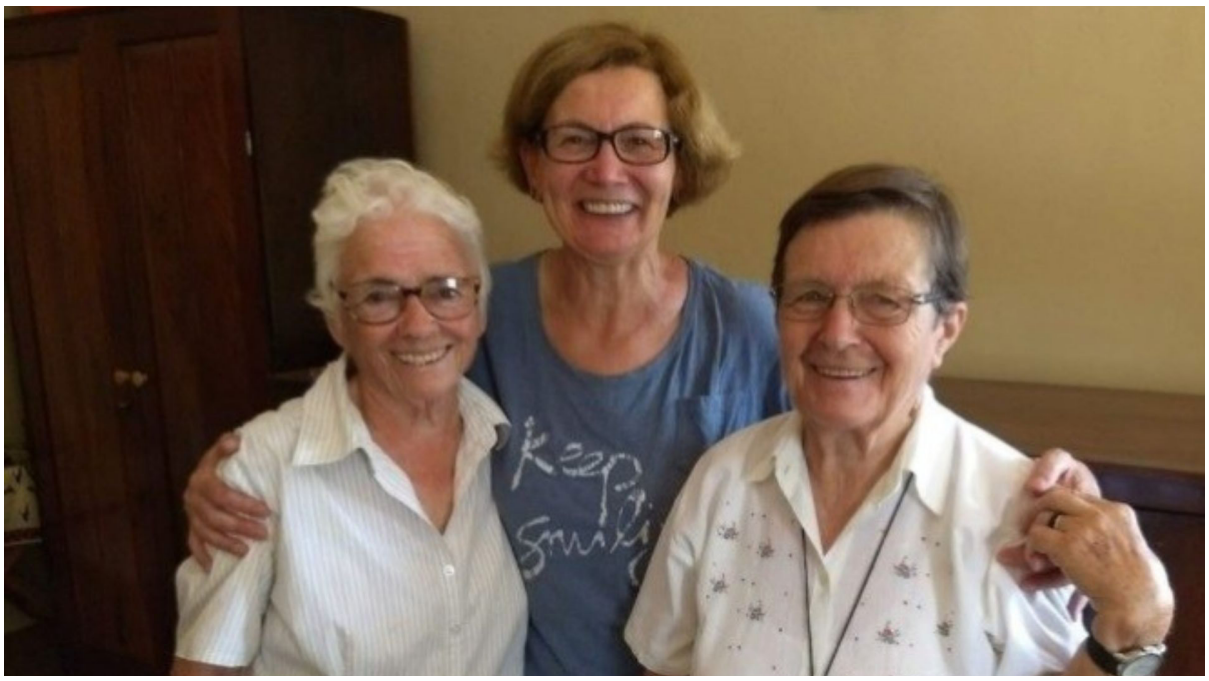
**Fourth, the challenge of assimilation**: Missionaries from the west applied the assimilation model to form African women religious; including prayers, food, and customs in the institute, etc. Up until today, the assimilation model has been applied in religious institutes: everyone assimilates to the practices of the dominant culture. Those in the formation are required to modify their behavior to adapt to community conventions. People from diverse backgrounds or social groups who enter communities that perpetuate a dominant culture try to behave in specific ways that will be acceptable to that dominant ethnic community or geography. While this may create some sense of cohesion, it can also perpetuate stereotypes; including a view that certain attributes, characteristics, and behaviors are typical of members of a particular group of people outside the dominant model. Changing social and global conditions are now inviting religious institutes to review some of their practices in this regard as new members are more mature and experienced and need to be integrated into communities. For religious institutes to attract and retain members it is important to explore strategies to welcome, nurture and support diverse members. In this way, we ensure the vitality of those communities and foster solidarity. This can be achieved if members seek to make others feel that they belong – at all levels. We must work on building relationships that make people feel at peace physically and psychologically, so they know they can be themselves and speak freely without retribution.

**Fifth, the challenge of power**. Power can easily corrupt individuals, as is evident in the political arena. Intercultural living invites us to reflect on how we use power in our institutes or ministries to steward those we lead, and how we utilize and share resources. Is power used to enable others to tap into their own unique strengths? Are resources put toward developing capacity, network members, and supports so that collectively they have what is needed to achieve goals for the Institute and wellbeing of all? Or is power used as a tool to intimidate or treat others unfairly? Are we prejudiced in our actions? In the position of our power, are we seeking to empower others to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience in a way that gives them a sense of hope and possibility?

**Sixth, the challenge of conflict.** In human society, conflicts are inevitable. However, it is essential to deeply explore the underlying causes of conflict and the best strategies to mitigate conflict before it occurs. I think of numerous conflicts in Africa, South Sudan, Congo, Mali, and many other countries and regions. These conflicts emanate from power issues, leadership struggles, cultural differences, apathy, and resources. An inability to bridge cultural differences and a resistance to power-sharing fuel conflict. Conflicts are used as a vehicle to intimidate those with different political opinions and as a pretext for religious persecution. They instill fear, evict the poor from their land, and impoverish communities. The labeling and victimization of ethnic groups eventually perpetuate stereotypes that foster difference "othering", so that some groups feel inferior to others. And of course, this will result in fear and hate that will then fuel even more conflict.

Rwanda, for example, is a Christian country with 80% Christians. Of these, 45% are Catholics, and 35% Protestant denominations. Yet, Rwanda imploded into genocide in 1994: ethnic communities were decimated and many poor people who did not understand the cultural undertones lost their lives. If the Gospel of Christ was truly proclaimed and centered in people's hearts, why did the genocide happen? In 2017, Pope Francis officially asked for forgiveness for the Church's role in the 1994 genocide, stating that in Rwanda, the "sins and failings of the Church and its members had ultimately disfigured the face of Catholicism."[9]

Just last year, a priest in the Rumbek diocese was indicted for playing a role in the gunning down of Fr. Christian Carlassare upon his appointment as bishop-elect of Rumbek[10]. In Kenya, a priest Guyo Waqo was jailed for 27 years for killing bishop Luigi Locati, the then bishop of Isiolo diocese, Kenya.[11] These three examples illustrate undercurrents of hate,



indifference, power struggles, resources, and the result in each case has been the loss of lives. How do we manage anger, hate, frustration, apathy, and conflict in religious institutes? Intercultural living presents an opportunity for introspection; a way for us to recognize that we too are the "other" from the perspective of people who are different from us. And in an intercultural living arrangement, these are sometimes the very people with whom we live, work, and pray.

**Seventh, the challenge of the elderly**. A few years ago, I visited a central African country. I stayed at a guest house with many sisters who hailed from various countries in Africa and Europe. I met a missionary from Europe who appeared distraught and hurting. I reached out and she told me a disturbing story of rejection. She had served in that country for 45 years, establishing several hospitals and serving in senior positions as Hospital Director. She was distraught because she had just been removed abruptly and –

to be frank, brutally – from her hospital leadership position. After all, the new provincial leadership did not need her services anymore – she was now "old" at 70. She was not allowed to hand over her responsibilities or celebrate 45 years of accomplishments. She was not prepared to leave the active ministry, let alone return to her home country in Europe. While there is much more to this story, such actions are common in Institutes and places of work. Intercultural living – which applies not just to ethnicity and language but also age – calls us to accompany those who are aging through dialogue.

We can learn from the invitation by Prophet Isaiah:

> *"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*

*How do we treat our elderly after years of service?* How do we treat those who are struggling and in danger of being rejected by our ministries due to age or other challenges? Dialogue provides for common understanding and helps to define approaches to address issues. On July 25, 2021, Pope Francis, while celebrating grandparents and the elderly, eloquently said, "Older people are not 'leftovers' to be discarded; rather, they continue to be precious nourishment for families, young people, and communities."

**Eighth, the challenge of vowed life**. Unlike contemporary society, the traditional roles of African women were marriage, childbearing, and housekeeping. There were not many alternative roles, as is the case today. As a result, women were taught to nurture and care for the family and for the home. Then, missionary encounters provided an alternative lifestyle for women – to enter religious life and even work outside the home. Through education, girls learned of religious life as a calling: when an individual discerns and makes a personal decision to respond to inner conversion, and a desire to give their life for love and service. This is the creative action of God. God alone can endow a person with the capacity to live a life of union with Christ – it is a unique and consecrated way of life.

God's call is beyond ethnicity, social status, or political divide; and the dignity of each person in response to the vocation should be respected. Missionaries made significant sacrifices; and the construction of a new cultural narrative conflicted with some African practices, fracturing traditional expectations and changing the role of women in society to include the possibility of embracing religious life and pursuing an education. Today, there is a tendency to have a conflict between living religious life and living the vows – there should be no in-between. Even after going through formation, a few consecrated women religious do not fully grasp the sacrifice and way of life that is their duty and commitment as women religious: the call to discipleship and the living of the vows in their entirety. The choice not to marry and to live the vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty is a conscious choice; with crystal clear expectations. This can be a very difficult reality for some. Interculturality – which values all people of all callings – has the power to help us meet such challenges as a community, if we open dialogue to freely discuss the challenges and struggles that individuals experience and are guided to discern and make conscious and informed decisions.

**Ninth, the challenge of traditional practices**. The church and synod of bishops continue to encourage inculturation of religious traditions, which allows Africans to live the faith within their cultural context. In his apostolic exhortation, "The joy of the Gospel," Pope Francis wrote: "In the Christian customs of an evangelized people, the Holy Spirit adorns the church, showing new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face." Through inculturation, the Church "introduces peoples, together with their culture, into her own community," for "every culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood, and lived (Evangelii Gaudium, 116).

Even with the church's teachings very clear, there are sometimes misalignment and other issues around some cultural practices. A 2018 U.S Department report revealed that thousands of women and their children in northern Ghana were left homeless after being accused of witchcraft. More than six witch camps spread throughout the region hold 2000-2500 adult women and over 1000 children.[12] Traditionally, witchcraft and incantations are deeply entrenched in some African cultural practices. Attentiveness to such practices and how they are discussed in religious communities, ministries, and among the people served is essential. There are times when conversations over such things have fractured communities and stereotyped members of certain ethnic groups. It is necessary to explore which cultural practices are relevant to be integrated into the liturgies and religious ceremonies, to ensure they are consistent with the church's teachings. There are more challenges that impact our society as well as opportunities – let us pause, look, observe, and listen intensely.

**Where do we go from here?**

In sum, intentional intercultural living is challenging, and not just because ethnic diversity is complex; even institutes with members from the same country made up of the same ethnic groups sometimes have difficulty living together. Often such difficulties stem from issues such as money, power, perceived superiority, stereotyping, and putting others down – and the topics at the root of these issues are rarely discussed, resulting in the silent suffering of many members. Religious institutes have made efforts to bring members of different nationalities and cultures together for initial or ongoing formation with the hope that this might solve the intercultural challenge. But realistically, in this setting, it is not uncommon to find one single ethnic group dominating: prioritizing mainstream language, food, music, and other practices as dictated by the dominant culture – rendering other cultures unimportant or invisible.

As a result, minority members then often become increasingly distressed and alienated, and silence becomes the norm. The intended consequences of creating an international or multicultural community are therefore not achieved; instead, members develop negative attitudes that result in no engagement.

Simply putting people from diverse backgrounds together does not necessarily create an intercultural community. For example, students in a boarding school, college dorm, or people at a conference do not suddenly make them interculturally savvy by virtue of proximity to others. True intercultural community emanates from an *intentional* discernment process that allows members to develop their individuality, encourages and facilitates dialogue, and creates an atmosphere of openness to learning. Intercultural community fosters individual dignity, enhances inclusivity and fairness, and validates other people's talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, contributions, and ideas. It is a community

where the prevailing belief is that other people's thoughts, views, and perspectives are important. Where active listening and seeking to understand is the norm. Where trust and respect develop, and all feel at home and welcome.

In closing, I want to come back to the teachings of Jesus as the primary starting point on our journey to interculturality. In the sermon on the mountain, Jesus reveals through the beatitudes the high law of love:

> *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."*
>
> Mt 5: 7-9.

The journey to intercultural living exposes our vulnerability and calls us to embrace humility, mercy, and a pure heart; and to become peacemakers. It is a journey of unlearning what we have always taken as absolute truth, learning and re-learning – this journey calls for openness, docility and benevolence.

If we are in places of authority, power, and leadership, we will do well to remember Jesus' teaching in Mt 25:35: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Jesus speaks these words with an open heart and is sensitive to the needs of the "other." Remember, for those who are thought of as "others" in our communities and workplaces – we can help them find or come home. Intercultural living calls for discernment, intentional commitment, dialogue within communities from varied perspectives, discerning of the suitability of entrants, and a readiness and willingness to adapt and learn from others. It is a wonderful opportunity to help individuals embrace difference, develop a variety of worldviews, and a capacity for social analysis.

In addition, ubuntu is a powerful tool to strengthen a community, communicate, and form a group identity that hinges on mutualism, empathy, generosity, and the commitment of its community members. Gittins advises that as women religious, faith cannot be expressed devoid of our cultural attributes. Indeed, cultural attributes are part of who we are. An intercultural community should value each person's cultural identity as a gift.

Therefore, in identifying the dynamics of intercultural living, it is vital to understand and acknowledge culture not just as what makes us different, but as the common denominator – because no person is without culture. Intercultural training will undoubtedly help women religious to learn ways to cultivate healthy relationships and together build intercultural communities but learning alone will not transform these communities. Members of the communities will be required to have intentionality, tolerance of ambiguity, mistakes, a forum for venting frustrations without judgment, appropriate correction, and genuine attentive listening, encouragement, and compassion.

Finally, there must be the implicitly stated collective awareness that this is a journey of healing and accompaniment to wholeness. These are the things that will help initiate vital conversations that foster fraternal relationships, solidarity with one another, healthy community living, a supportive atmosphere, and above all…a centering of our lives on God, who walks with us on this journey. We are not alone, Jesus promised us, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. Mt 28:20.

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# SYNODALITY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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## 1. What I have seen and heard: between observations and questions

As a starting point, we point out three (3) observations::

***First observation:***

In some local Churches, we are witnessing the almost total disappearance of the generations under fifty years of age from parish life. A diversity of opinions and beliefs constitutes the backdrop of some local churches today. There are no answers, but there are attempts at answers, sometimes surprising, on the part of some local churches. There is talk of openness in moral matters, of rootedness of identity or of the co-optation at various levels of the laity in the exercise of ministerial functions. But is this enough? As we have seen, neither the courage of St. John Paul II nor the intellectual acumen of Benedict XVI was enough to bring the Church back into the game of the great story. The reality of the contemporary world is that the authority of the hierarchy on the spiritual plane has been swept away by history.

In his search for meaning, contemporary man no longer accepts answers from above. Contemporary religiosity emphasizes the importance of personal journeys in the search for meaning in the face of the offer of the ecclesiastical institution. Therefore, it is necessary to place at the center the person's personal search for faith. Only from this new center will it be possible to regenerate a strong need for belonging and Catholic identity.

***Second observation:***

On the other hand, in other local Churches, it is rather the vitality of their youth, there is a bubbling of initiatives, of diverse and varied movements with their challenges:

- the challenge of identity
- the challenge of the encounter with the other,
- the challenge of socio-cultural diversity

- and the challenge of giving the world a message and actions appropriate and adapted to the changing context of contemporary crises. I am thinking especially of the Churches of Africa, which I know best.

***Third observation:***

Finally, the whole Church is called to become aware of the necessity and urgency of integrating the ecumenical dimension and dialogue with other believers and non-believers. This is one of the perspectives of synodality, which integrates the way in which the People of God walks with the whole human family. Therefore, the focus will be on the state of relations, dialogue and possible common initiatives with believers of other religions, with people far from the faith, as well as with specific places and social groups, with their institutions (the world of politics, culture, economy, finance, labor, trade unions and business associations, non-governmental organizations and civil society, popular movements, minorities of various kinds, the poor and the excluded, etc.).

Four questions emerge from these observations that I would like to share with you and that can be expanded upon.

The **first** concerns ourselves: what are we doing, from where do we act and speak, what is the Holy Spirit calling us to do today?

The **second** concerns the situation of the Church in today's world: why a synod on synodality in the Catholic Church? What does innovation consist in?

The third question concerns hierarchical and religious power in the Church.

Is it a question of increasing the Church's popularity by involving the laity in the exercise of "hierarchical" power? Is "religious power" enough today to find the ultimate meaning of its life? Will we succeed in making the Church popular again by changing the face of power, that is, by making it more secular or more feminine?

Finally, **the fourth question** brings us to the theme of our intervention: What does the Church need most today: does it need more priests or the restoration of the legitimate autonomy of the lay faithful, individually or in association? "What other steps are the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? How can we ensure that this Synod does not appear to be a bureaucratic and disembodied process? What is the purpose of this gigantic consultation of all Catholics? These are the questions that the preparatory document for the synod tries to answer, indicating above all how to proceed concretely, without omitting to respond to the criticisms.

Certainly, there are other questions that are still posed to us and to the Church today. The challenge is to listen to the voice of all God's people, of those who have no voice in our communities and of all those who do not share our faith. Can synodality be a response of the Church to all these interpellations? This is what we will try to see.

## 2. Synodality, an attempt at a Church response

The question of synodality in the Catholic Church shifts the axis of Catholicism from parishes and other intra-ecclesial "places" to the "street," to the profane, to the poorest, to everyday life. In convening the synod on synodality, Pope Francis invites us to enter into a process of openness and mutual listening. For him, it is a process to allow each one to express his experience, his feelings and his thoughts. He calls the whole Church to seek a new model, one that overcomes unequal relationships of superiority and subordination, engaging in a dialogue that builds new ecclesial channels and structures for the third millennium.

Today, the voice of the Church is composed of many different voices and the Synod is a time of grace where the unified and coherent message is diversity and plurality. In other words, synodality is about discerning how the Spirit moves through and with the Body of Christ, so that we can continue to fulfill our mission of evangelization in the world. In this context, this Synod is relevant to discerning needed reforms in the Church.

Therefore, it is in a spirit of dialogue, openness and meaningful sharing of experiences, for what concerns all must be addressed and agreed upon by all. The aim of this synod is to engage the Church in a common journey. Today, the spirit has much to say to us. It is in this sense that we must understand the three key words of this Synod: Communion, Participation and Mission. I would add, shared responsibility. We are living the most important event of the current phase of reception of the Second Vatican Council under the pontificate of Pope Francis. The term synodality expresses the very nature, form, style and mission of the Church.

Certainly, the Church is accustomed to dialogue and consultation. By engaging in mutual listening, it does not limit itself to the Church alone, but involves other believers in reflection on the great questions of our time. There is, among others, the ecumenical aspect, the interreligious dialogue and the dialogue with non-believers, without hiding, at the African level, the dialogue with traditional religions. In this sense, synodality is important because it questions the quality of our relationships: intercommunity, interreligious, interconfessional, our relationships between Christians and non-Christians.

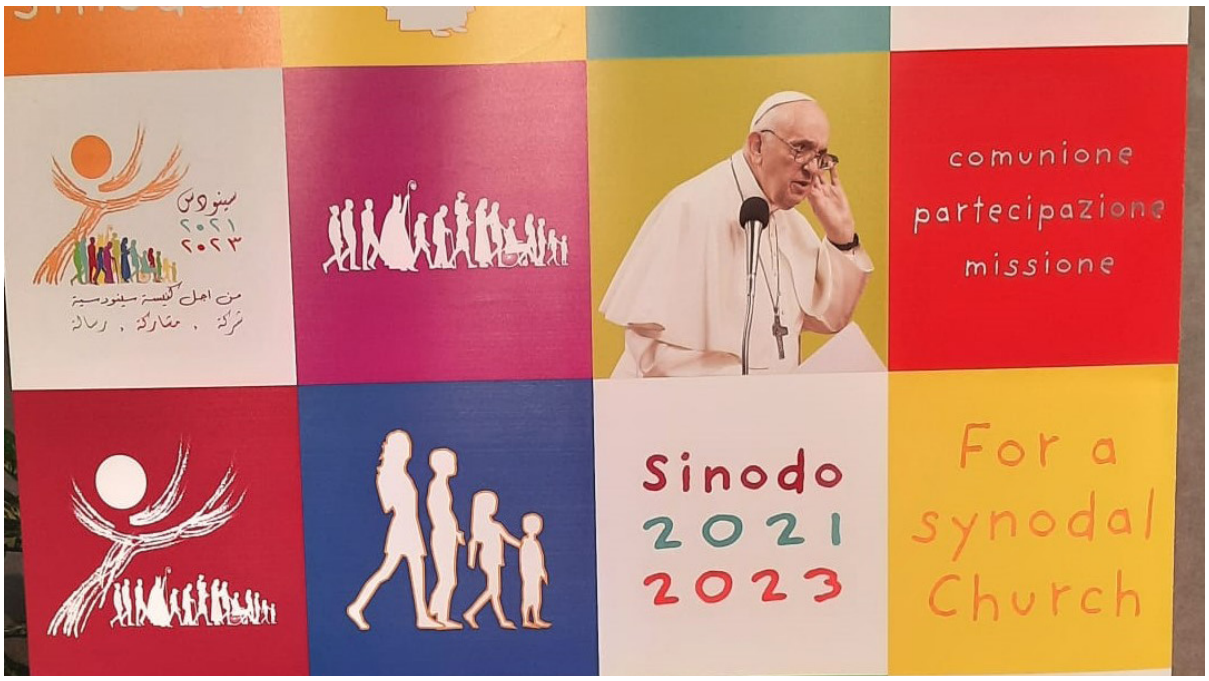
For this, we need groups, associations, movements of the faithful inspired by the Holy Spirit from the grassroots, which allow us to recognize that evangelization is a life. For faith to flourish anew, it is urgent to give the Holy Spirit the freedom to act in the people of God as he sees fit, perhaps giving rise to initiatives that do not come from bishops and priests. Let us not be surprised, therefore, to see lay people acting in a Christian way, but outside the parish-diocesan circuits, on paths of spirituality that they themselves can trace out day by day without hindrance or control.

From the point of view of Africa, from where I am speaking (Burkina Faso), this synodality opens perspectives in the continent. My conviction is that, if we commit ourselves to this common path, as a church family of God in Africa, we will contribute much to the universal Church. When I see, for example, our young people with all their potential, the place of women and their commitment in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) and parishes, this also reflects the youth and dynamism of our local Churches.

Among the big questions is that of culture: what if we were to speak of the synodality of cultures? At this level, we must ask ourselves if our cultures do not have something innovative and prophetic to contribute to this common journey with the universal Church.

I love the image of the journey to which the Church invites us. Synodality is like a journey of discernment that we undertake together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with all the faithful and all the ministries. During this journey we have to listen to one another, pray, reflect on the will of the Holy Spirit and share our experiences of faith and life. Listening is one of the two pillars of the synodal process.

The Church invites us to begin this journey by listening to the Spirit, listening to one another in open dialogue, for the purpose of this journey is not only to meet, listen and get to know one another better, but to work together "to be able to make pastoral




decisions". Through listening and sharing, we will try to understand what this will of the Holy Spirit is. We are, therefore, a listening Church.

For this it is necessary to:

"Walk together" involving all God's people in a common mission with creativity and authenticity. This is participation. For this, we must convert ourselves, for a common discernment of our places of mission. The great challenge is to create a culture of ecclesial consensus, capable of manifesting itself in synodal styles, events and structures that give rise to a new ecclesial way of proceeding for the Church of the third millennium.

**3. What the history of the Church tells us about this synodal listening.**

If we refer to the history of the Church, this practice is not new to her. It is worth recalling the golden rule of Bishop St. Cyprian, which can be considered the synodal form of the first millennium and which offers the most appropriate interpretative framework for thinking about today's challenges: "Nothing without the council of the presbyterate and the consensus of the people". For this bishop of Carthage, the council of the presbyterate and the consensus with the people were fundamental experiences throughout his episcopal exercise to maintain communion in the Church. To this end, he knew how to devise methods based on dialogue and common discernment, which allowed the participation of all, not just the presbyters, in deliberations and decisions. The first millennium offers examples of a forma ecclesiae in which the exercise of power was understood as a shared responsibility.

**What if we were to speak of the synodality of cultures? At this level, we must ask ourselves if our cultures do not have something innovative and prophetic to contribute to this common journey with the universal Church.**

Inspired by this way of proceeding, Pope Francis describes the new ecclesial model as follows: "A synodal Church is a Church of listening (...). It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn (...). It is listening to God, to the point of listening with him to the cry of the people; and it is listening to the people, to the point of instilling in them the will to which God calls us"[1]. The exercise of listening is indispensable in a synodal ecclesiology, because it starts from the recognition of the identity of the ecclesial subjects - laity, priests, religious, bishops, Pope - on the basis of horizontal relationships founded on the radicality of the baptismal dignity and on the participation in the common priesthood of all the faithful.[2] The Church as a whole is qualified by listening processes in which each ecclesial subject contributes something that complements the identity and mission of the other[3], starting from what is proper to each one[4].

## 4. Synodality, a more complete way of being Church

Listening is not an end in itself. It is part of a broader process in which the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue and counsel so that pastoral decisions are made in accordance with God's will. This series of relationships and dynamics of communication creates an environment conducive to welcoming advice and seeking consensus, which then translates into decisions. It is important to take into account all the actions when undertaking a listening process: "Pray, listen, analyze, dialogue and advise", because the goal of this journey is not only to meet, listen and get to know each other better, but to work together "to be able to make pastoral decisions"[5]. Without this horizon, there is a risk of limiting the understanding and exercise of synodality to a simple affective and environmental practice, without effectively translating it into concrete changes that would help overcome the current clerical institutional model.[6]

Among the elements for reflection and the objectives set forth in the Preparatory Document, four fundamental dimensions stand out:

- To live an ecclesial process implies the participation and inclusion of all,
- To offer everyone - especially those who for various reasons are marginalized - the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God.
- To experience ways of exercising shared responsibility in the service of the proclamation of the Gospel and the commitment to build a more just, beautiful and livable world.
- To examine the way in which responsibility and power are lived in the Church, as well as the structures by which they are managed, highlighting and attempting to convert prejudices and deviant practices that are not rooted in the Gospel.

As the last paragraph of the Preparatory Document reminds us, "the goal of the Synod" of 2023, "is not to produce documents, but "to make dreams germinate, raise prophecies and visions, make hopes bloom, stimulate trust, bind wounds, weave relationships, resurrect a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a positive imaginary that enlightens minds, warms hearts and gives strength to hands"[7]. We read in watermark the prophecy of Joel 2, 28 so dear to Pope Francis. "After this, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men and women will dream dreams and your young people will see visions".

As Cardinal Mario Grech underlined in the presentation of the document: the "synod" is not a parliamentary process in which the majority and the game of the parties makes the strongest, the most numerous win, but it is a spiritual process, anchored in the liturgical celebration and in prayer, "spiritual", that is, "in the Holy Spirit", in the reciprocal listening of what the Spirit says to the churches. The process should not be seen only from the perspective of the most mediatic issues, such as the vote of women in the Synod of Bishops and the "synodal journey". The Church must take up the challenge of accompanying suffering persons and communities.

**5. The two biblical images: Jesus, the crowd in its diversity and the apostles**

Let us remember with the Church these two images from Scripture in order to set synodality in motion as the Preparatory Document shows us[8]. One arises in the representation of the "community dimension" that constantly accompanies the journey of evangelization; the other refers us to the experience of the Spirit lived by Peter and the primitive community. Thus, Jesus, the multitude in its diversity, the apostles: this is the image and the mystery that must be contemplated and continually deepened so that the Church may become more and more what it is. None of these three actors can leave the stage.

If Jesus is absent and another takes his place, the Church becomes a contract between the apostles and the crowd, and their dialogue will end up being reduced to a political game.

Without the apostles, who receive their authority from Jesus and are instructed by the Spirit, the relationship with the Gospel truth breaks down and the crowd runs the risk of reducing their vision of Jesus to a myth or an ideology, whether they accept or reject him.

Without the multitude, the apostles' relationship with Jesus becomes corrupted into a sectarian form in which religion becomes self-referential and evangelicalism loses its light, which comes only from God who reveals himself to humanity and speaks directly to anyone to offer salvation. These images reveal to us the conditions and meaning of the true encounter.

**6. The conditions for a true encounter**

First of all, the encounter presupposes a willingness to get to know the other: his faith, his sensitivity, the history of his religious community. We live by prefabricated ideas, by slogans inherited from a long history of conflicts. In all of us there is an effort to listen and to understand that is indispensable. This is a necessary attitude for any encounter. It is also the fruit of it.

Secondly, the encounter requires that we overcome our mutual fears. Fear of the other is often a sign of our lack of personal religious conviction. There is a risk of transforming the other into a potential aggressor.

Finally, the encounter is listening and also responding. Therefore, it is necessary that each person has sufficient interior freedom to say and express his faith in its specificity. To say one's faith is not to judge that of the other. It is not to impose oneself. It is to be oneself with one's riches and shortcomings. I meet not to make my own the convictions of my interlocutor, but to know better his way of believing and to be brought back to my own convictions of faith. Far from making me abandon my own faith, the encounter itself strengthens it.

Under these conditions, the interreligious encounter can be fruitful for all and a factor of peace for the world. To conclude, I would like to quote this African proverb that illustrates the cultural depth of traditional African thinking on coexistence: "in the forest, when the branches of the trees quarrel, their roots embrace". The branches represent diversity, the singularities that distinguish and separate. The embracing roots are the intangible, the deep values that unite. The challenge for the vitality of the whole tree, society, is not to cut, eliminate, mask the diversity of the branches, of the communities of society, but to nourish the trunk through "coexistence", through the dialectic of unity in diversity, and

to make the embracing roots nourish the fighting branches.

The encounter in this dynamic opens wide prospects for conversion. To the extent that we allow ourselves to be provoked, enriched and built up by the holiness of the other, we can find in the encounter of the world's religions a climate of authentic spiritual emulation. In a way, this is in keeping with the beautiful verse of the Qur'an:

"If God had willed, He would have made you one community. But He has willed to test you by the gift He has given you. Try to surpass one another in good deeds. The return to God will be for all of you, and He will enlighten you about your differences" (Surah 48-verse 5).

Do we not find a similar attitude in Jesus' testament to his disciples during the last supper: "Stop troubling your hearts.... There are many dwelling places in the Father's house..." (Jn 14:1-2). (Jn 14:1-2).

## 7. The symbolic power of collective action and the challenges at the African level.

When looking at the overall picture of Africa, what strikes the observer is the complexity of the African religious landscape. One can distinguish large religious areas corresponding to large geographical areas. Christians, Muslims and followers of the African Traditional Religion (ATR)[9] make up a large part of its population.[10] There is no doubt that the cultural and the religious far outweigh the public and the political. They are a central component of the processes of socio-political change affecting the continent [11]. This perspective can help to understand the contemporary evolution of the diversification of religious offerings, the expansion of new actors or the mobility of individual behaviors. We speak then of social space, of religious space in the expression of religious diversity. That is to say, one can choose, from a very wide range of traditions, where and with whom to worship.

There is not only the individual relationship, but also the collective experience. This happens in the neighborhoods with the ASC (Sports and Cultural Association). Young Christians and Muslims form groups. They organize socio-cultural events around common themes: unemployment, violence, success, marriage, family, solidarity, the book (Koran/Bible), etc. It is a sharing, an expression of concrete life, which allows each one to discover the other. These associations are places of hospitality and openness to others. In the middle of a neighborhood, where tensions can be high, it is possible to spend hours listening to others with respect and interest. This means that religious faith is not a problem to be solved, but a motivating force to be appreciated and used for the common good.

We have a traditional understanding of authority and power that is a burden on the practice of subsidiarity and collegiality as concrete expressions of ecclesial communion. It is a call to conversion and to the culture of encounter. We are aware that we do not really know the reality of the Churches in Africa. For example, what West Africa experiences is often not known to East Africa; what French-speakers experience is often not known

to English-speakers or Portuguese-speakers. How can we get to know each other in this process? This implies a synodal conversion of the Church, but also a personal conversion in order to be able to accept, to go to meet others. It is a mission of conversion to dialogue together. In our dioceses, are the instruments of synodality such as the council of consultors, the presbyteral council, the pastoral council, etc., functioning? And how?

**Conclusion**

Returning to the Preparatory Document, let us retain some guidelines to continue sharing experiences in a dynamic of mutual listening.

a. What experiences of your commitment to the promotion of Justice and Peace make you think about this fundamental question of walking together?

b. Reread these experiences more deeply: what joys did they provoke? what difficulties and obstacles did they encounter? what wounds did they bring to light? what intuitions did they awaken?

c. Gather the fruits to share: how does the voice of the Spirit resonate in these "synodal" experiences? What is the Spirit asking of us today? What are the points to be confirmed, the changes to be considered, the new steps to be taken? Where do we see a consensus being built? What paths are opening up for our particular Church, our congregation, our world, our community?

1 Address of Pope Francis on the occasion of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops. Saturday 17 October 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html
2 Lumen Gentium 10.
3 Apostolicam Actuositatem 6.
4 AA 29.
5 Document préparatoire n°4- 9
6 Cf. Rafael Luciani, « Prendre conseil et construire un consensus : un synode sur la synodalité » 07 septembre 2021 in Revista Mensaje N° 702, septiembre 2021.
7 Cf. Francis' speech at the beginning of the Synod on Youth (3 October 2018).
8 Document Préparatoire, n°16-24
9 Cf. Luka Lusala lu ne Nkuka, SJ, Jésus-Christ et la religion africaine. Réflexion christologique à partir de l'analyse des mythes d'Osiris, de Gueno, d'Obatala, de Kiranga et de Nzala Mpanda, (Documenta Missionalia 36), Roma : Gregorian and Biblical Press 2010. Beaucoup de publications en anthropologie ou en théologie ont été consacrées à la religion africaine, souvent nommée au pluriel : religions africaines. Toutes s'accordent pour voir dans la religion africaine une religion où l'homme, par une série d'observances rituelles et morales, cherche à vivre en harmonie avec la nature, avec les autres hommes et avec Dieu pour assurer son salut dans l'au-delà.
10 Cf. CODESRIA, « Genre, Cultures, politique et Fondamentalismes » (Institut sur le Genre. Février 2011)
11 Voir, entre autres, Achille Mbemba, « La prolifération du divin en Afrique sub-saharienne », in KEPEL G., (dir.), Les politiques de Dieu, Paris, Seuil, 1993, p. 177-201 ; BAYART J.-F., (dir.), Religion et modernité politique en Afrique noire. Dieu pour tous et chacun pour soi, Paris, Karthala, 1993 ; CONSTANTIN F. et COULON C., (dir.), Religion et transition démocratique en Afrique, Paris, Karthala, 1997

# NAMING THE UNNAMED
# WHAT IS CONDUCIVE TO ABUSES OF POWER AND CONSCIENCE IN CONSECRATED LIFE?

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We are living in a situation of global crisis due to abuses in the ecclesial sphere.[1] This statement may seem exaggerated to those who are not familiar with this problem, but it certainly is not. It is not just a matter of specific crimes committed by individuals, but of a structural problem in the Church that requires reflection, rethinking, and reform. This is what Pope Francis himself wrote to Cardinal Marx:

> The whole Church is in crisis because of the abuse; furthermore, the Church cannot take a step forward now without accepting this crisis. The approach of the ostrich does not help [...] Not everyone wants to accept this fact, but it is the only way. Because making "resolutions" to change life without "putting the meat on the grill" leads nowhere [...] reality must always be accepted and needs discernment [...] It is important to throw open to the wind the reality of abuse.[2]

The social alarm, the abundance of reflections from various disciplines, and even the canonical measures have focused on sexual abuse but left in the background three issues that are much less addressed. All three directly affect women's Consecrated Life (CL). First, female victims have been made invisible. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, in the case of abused minors, the percentage of boy victims is somewhat higher than that of girls. This led to some attempts to link pederasty and homosexuality, a connection that is now excluded. In any case, this fact left the abused girl minors in the background, depriving them of attention.

In the case of older women, the silencing of female victims is much greater. This is due to a misunderstanding in the ecclesial sphere of the phenomenon of abuse and its dynamics. This erroneous perception leads to the assumption that, if there is no violence or if there are no objective and limiting physical or psychological circumstances in one of the parties, sexual relations between adults are always consensual. In addition, it is often suspected that the woman provokes the situation. This leads to situations of double victimization that make it difficult both to denounce and to reveal what happened, which is a necessary step in the victims' recovery process. It is important to understand clearly that those who have suffered abuse do not speak when they want to, but when they can, and they also need a safe and welcoming environment in which their word has credibility.

We will never know the exact number of sexual abuses committed against women, but it is even less likely that we will know how many consecrated women have suffered them. A 1998 study by the School of Psychology at St. Louis University (USA) analyzed the consequences of trauma on Catholic women religious in over 530 communities. The results, obtained through anonymous surveys, showed that 30% of the sisters had been victims of sexual abuse. This is not an irrelevant number and requires us to ask ourselves whether we generate, in the communities, an atmosphere of trust, empathy, and welcome that facilitates the disclosure of these situations or whether, rather, suspicion, misunderstanding, or judgment abound.

A second aspect that has not received as much attention is non-sexual abuse. Although cases of sexual abuse are generating great social alarm, sexual abuse is only the tip of the iceberg, the tip pointing us towards all the abusive practices that affect the sphere of power and conscience. In fact, every form of abuse is actually power abuse since limits are exceeded and the asymmetry of the bond between two people is used inappropriately. This difference between the parties in the relationship may be due, for example, to position, age, social recognition and esteem, knowledge of each other's intimacies or spiritual admiration.

The fact that power abuse and the abuse of conscience have not received as much attention is due, among other reasons, to the difficulty in objectifying them, typifying them, and considering them an imputable offense. It is indeed quite likely that the victims of these abusive practices themselves are not aware that they are being manipulated. As in cases of gender-based violence, if there is no explicit violence, it is very difficult to acknowledge to oneself and to show to others that one is suffering psychological abuse. In Religious Life, we have perhaps normalized a way of managing power and religious authority that makes it even more difficult to identify these situations, including for those who are subjected to them, and they may even blame themselves for what is happening to them.

Thirdly, the abuses that take place within the ecclesial structures continue to be silenced. The Church, driven by social alarm, is reacting, not very quickly. Yet, what about abusive situations that occur within its institutions? The voices raised warning about this tend to do so from outside because they have often been forced to leave.

There is nothing strange about the fact that among the reasons given for asking to leave Religious Life include problems with authority and with the Institute, especially among those who leave our Congregations after many years of consecration. In these cases, it is easier to believe that the problem is personal and not to question whether we have some responsibility for the difficulties, including psychological ones, which have led to a decision that is often also painful for those who leave.

We should ask ourselves what protocols exist to respond to a Sister who is suffering abuses of power and conscience in her own institution, whether they are effective, and

if those who make decisions can maintain the necessary objectivity to confront them. In the frequent recourse to transferring to another community or Province or even departure from the Institute, the victim is always the one who loses out and is forced into a change that leaves the abuser unpunished. In this way, she is victimized once again by an institution that has not known how to confront the manipulator.

As we have been saying from the beginning, the problem of abuse has a structural character. If we want to explain it with an image, its effect is like that of lead in wine. Archaeological studies have shown that human remains from the Roman Empire contain very high levels of lead, which is a poisonous element and very harmful to health. This is due to the Roman custom of serving and drinking wine in lead containers because it gave it a different taste that people appreciated at the time without knowing that it was toxic. In fact, the wine was not bad, but the container in which it was served and kept, with good intentions, was. In the case of abusive practices, we find something similar. There are not just "rotten apples," but our "baskets" can make them rot and turn wine, which theoretically would not necessarily be bad, into poison.

Ecclesial studies and also independent ones have shown that the problem of abuse lies in the modes of governance. Pope Francis also insistingly repeats, in one way or another, that clericalism is at the root of these situations. Although the name may be misleading, *clericalism* not only affects men who have received the ministry of orders. It is a focus of power in certain people and in the way in which this power is experienced. It is an attitude from which no one with power is exempt.

We tend to think that only those who hold responsibilities of government in a Congregation have power. These people undoubtedly have it, but so do bursars, formators, directors of works, pastoral directors, catechists... In reality, the list is endless because we all have a certain degree of power over others; so, no one is free to manage it by excluding, dominating, or manipulating.

In Religious Life, as such, there is a breeding ground for abuses of power and conscience. This statement does not imply that they occur *per se*, but rather that in this vocation there are circumstances that are much more conducive to it than in other areas or in other ways of following Jesus Christ. In what follows, we will briefly explain these elements that interrelate and facilitate such abusive situations. To do this, we will divide them into specific elements of Religious Life, specific elements of individuals, and elements that concern group dynamics.

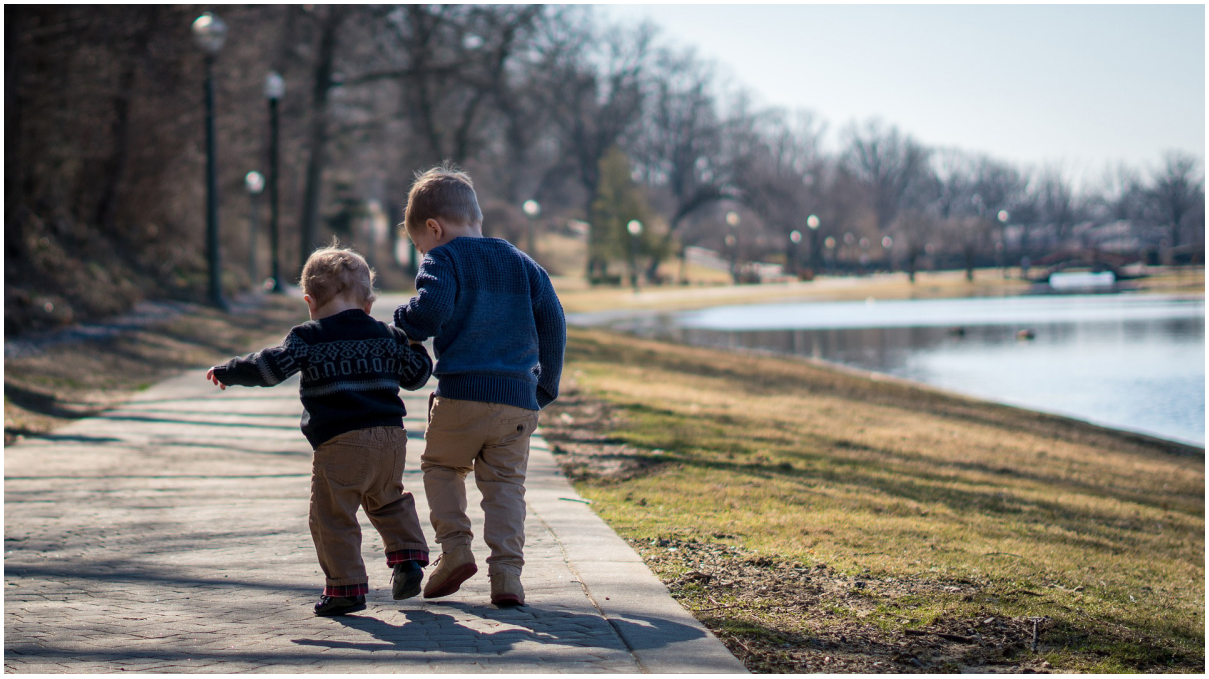
## 1. Specific Elements of Consecrated Life

One of the characteristic elements of this vocation is that one of its charismatic mediations for the following of Christ is the vow of obedience. That is to say, the common demand of obedience to God required of every Christian is, in our case, mediated by the person who assumes the service of authority. The most evident consequence of this fact is that the Institutes of Religious Life are organized in a hierarchical manner, since there are those who have a responsibility over others, and this is an open door to *clericalism*, in that broad sense of which we spoke. When a clear difference between the members of the Institute is made, there is a possibility that what was meant to be mediation may easily degenerate into a space of abuse.

We all have our share of power and, for that very reason, we can use it to make it grow or in an abusive way, but the very structure of Religious Life gives power to some over others. Even though the Code of Canon Law states the need for the tasks of government to be limited in time, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of

Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) has clearly stated that this type of responsibility is all too frequently perpetuated.[3] This is done by circumventing the time limits set by the Constitutions and alternating from one office to another or from one community to another. This hinders the necessary change of perspectives, outlooks, and orientations in the institutions and it is a notorious poverty that the spirit of the Code of Canon Law seeks to avoid.

We must ask ourselves what we must do to make it possible for the relays to take place, to recognize the gifts of the Sisters, and to strengthen their constructive leadership abilities. The wisdom that lies behind the requirement to limit the time of responsibilities of government is not only intended to prevent power abuse, but also to avoid monolithic views and favor the wealth that a change of perspective always entails. From these points of view, what is the concrete practice of rotation in our Institutes, and how can we improve it?



Along with the necessary alternation, it is also worth remembering that the task of superiors is restricted to the mission of the congregation—that is, it affects the external environment of persons. Whoever assumes the service of authority has the responsibility to watch over the common good, to take care of the institutional mission, to generate an atmosphere conducive to the following Christ, and each one's human and faithful development, but nothing that concerns the sphere of conscience or intimacy pertains to their responsibility.

The spiritual way in which this task has been referred to over time facilitates a certain confusion between a superior's responsibility and a kind of "spiritual maternity" that is dangerous and conducive to abuses of power and conscience. In fact, the Code of Canon Law carefully prohibits the sister who assumes the service of authority from in any way inducing someone to manifest their conscience to her (can. 630 § 5).

Moreover, the vow of obedience implies surrendering the will, but not the conscience, nor the intelligence, the believing certainty, or the intuition of the Spirit.

The fundamental obedience of which superiors are mediators is to God, and He speaks to us through our conscience (GS 16), so no request can involve the realm of our intimacy. Certain habitual practices in Religious Life can easily lead to abuses of conscience. For example, the custom of "conversations with the superior," of giving an "account of prayer," the demand that those in temporary vows be "accompanied" by their superior, or the concentration of the superior and mistress of novices in a single person.

Another characteristic element in Religious Life is the formation process. Those who enter our institutions spend some time getting to know this vocation and preparing themselves to live it. This is a particularly delicate period, since the desire to learn and to do God's will implies disconnecting all of one's warning and protection systems. Those who enter our Institutes do so with trust in the formators that the Congregation indicates

**The problem is that what we do not name, not only does not disappear, but we paradoxically give it more dominion. We need to give it citizenship status and recognize that yearning so that it may be evangelized.**

to them; and that is a condition for the realization of the formative process and, at the same time, a possibility that this same trust may be betrayed, since what is transmitted by the formators is accepted as normal, whether it is or not. Nor is it difficult, moreover, for those being formed to open the sphere of conscience to their formators.

The purpose of any formative process is none other than to help the person develop all her human capacities and her faith and, so, gain autonomy and inner freedom. Therefore, something is wrong when we find people in formation who are childish and dependent on what their formator thinks, says, or does. We are at a stage in which it is not difficult to normalize manipulative relationships and abusive practices.

Another characteristic element of Religious Life is that we feel convoked around a charism shared by the members of the Institute. After the Second Vatican Council and the call it launched for this vocation to renew itself, a theology of charism developed. Charism, by definition, is a gift of the Holy Spirit and therefore has an intrinsic dynamism that is

the opposite of a rigid, delimited, fixed perception in time. Moreover, the institutional charisms are enriched by the personal charisms of the members of the Institute, so that faithfulness to the charismatic legacy necessarily means being creative and enrich it, additionally, with each one's gifts.

Despite this dynamic aspect of the charisms, in practice they are often lived as something fixed and immutable. The understanding that the charismatic legacy is something static and clearly delimited can entail two risks that facilitate abusive practices.

First, this charismatic experience carries with it a perception of threat. Since it cannot change, the charisma must be protected, and superiors become its main guardians and depositaries. Thus, it is not difficult to end up considering those in charge of the institute as saviors of the spiritual legacy; and, thus, while their understanding of the charism is canonized as the only valid and true one, any other way of understanding it is rendered illegitimate. Secondly, a fossilized perception of the charism easily turns into an unquestionable ideology capable of justifying everything and sequestering consciences.

Another characteristic element of Religious Life is community life. In this vocation, we live with people we did not choose and, perhaps, would never have chosen. We are not united by blood ties, nor by tastes, and sometimes not even by the same idea of what this concrete way of following Jesus Christ implies. Despite all this, we know and feel called by God to share our daily lives. Being part of a group that lives together requires that we consider a series of psychological and group dynamics that is not essential in other Christian vocations and which, in order to gain clarity, we will deal with in the last section.

## 2. Specific Elements of Individuals

In the ecclesial sphere, we often tend to err on the side of naivety, perhaps especially in Religious Life. Sometimes we do not realize the distance that separates the ideals we express in our speeches from our daily decisions. We are not always aware of the infinite capacity for self-deception that human beings have. It takes a great deal of self-knowledge and authenticity to tell oneself the true facts without half-measures or palliatives. This unawareness does not exempt us from the responsibility it entails. Not expressing, in clear words, the real reasons of our actions, hidden behind politically correct speeches, is one of the greatest sins, even though it is not frequently confessed.

In most cases, it is not a question of hypocrisy, of thinking something and saying the contrary, but of obviating and disregarding the real dynamics that drive our actions and that do not fit so clearly into our religious discourses. This unawareness is very evident in the desire for power, shared by all human beings, although it is not verbalized in the ecclesial sphere. According to the Gospel tradition, Jesus Christ himself was tempted by the desire for power; but in the Church it is hidden and not named. It seems that we harbor the illusion that wanting to live in service or speaking of "washing feet" makes the desire for power disappear, but this is not true.

This tendency toward denial is increasing in female Religious Life because we have integrated a self-image that attributes strength and power to men and values such as gentleness and submission to women. If it can already be difficult to recognize the presence of the desire for power in the ecclesial sphere, it is even more complicated when our unconscious imaginary of what values should characterize a woman rejects power. The problem is that what we do not name, not only does not disappear, but we paradoxically give it more dominion. We need to give it citizenship status and recognize that yearning so that it may be evangelized.

Along with this desire for power that we all share, we must take into account certain psychological tendencies that facilitate the abuse of power and conscience, in both abusers and victims. Without necessarily reaching the level of personality disorder, those with a certain tendency towards narcissism have a special facility for using the power of a position abusively.

The need to generate admiration, arrogance, and the lack of real measure of self leads them to annul those who can overshadow them and to surround themselves with people whom they can easily manipulate. These are people who find it difficult to discover the needs of others and validate their feelings but also to recognize their own mistakes and take the blame. They are usually charming, even charismatic, people who know how to conform to what is expected of them and are quick to recognize the weaknesses of those around them.

We tend to caricature abusers because it is easier for us to imagine that they are terrible monsters and cruel people, but the appearance of the worst abusers is just the opposite. Those who are admired and whom no one would believe capable of mistreating others are far more dangerous than those who grossly abuse their sphere of power.

We also tend to have difficulty understanding the psychology of the victim. We think that this only happens to weak people or to those with some objective difficulty that we pretend to gather in the qualifier "vulnerable." We tend not to realize that we are all potential victims because everyone is susceptible to being mistreated and harmed while thinking that we are being cared for. However, this universal possibility of being manipulated increases according to the circumstances, especially when we have certain wounds in our own history. Thus, those who have lived through toxic or abusive relationships are more likely to fall back into them.

Our inability to put ourselves in the victim's shoes appears when we wonder why they did nothing to avoid it. We tend not to understand the so-called learned helplessness syndrome from which many victims suffer. The frustration and helplessness felt when we find ourselves in an abusive situation can lead us to forgo doing anything because, at some point, we have experienced that nothing could be done.

This learning is so engraved that this impotence and helplessness is assumed and leads them not to act in order to avoid suffering, convinced that they can do nothing. If only we were gaining in sensitivity and could sense the complexity of the experiences of a victim, who does not do what he/she wants but what he/she can.

When faced with a situation of abuse of power or conscience, it is essential for the victim to have a support network that enables him or her to cope and react. Unfortunately, in community life, this is not as frequent as one would hope.

### 3. Specific Elements of Group Dynamics

Group psychology has shown us that there are community dynamics and structures that favor abusive practices. In line with the image that we have used above, we could ask ourselves: What makes a human group become that lead capable of poisoning the wine? There are questions that have to do with the sociological situation in which we live. Long ago, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman defined this society as a *liquid society*. Simplifying a lot, this author showed that we are living in times characterized by the absence of sure and solid realities, where the criteria for what is valid and what is not are so dissimilar that uncertainty reigns.

While in other times identity was practically given to us, today everyone is obliged to build their own. Now, in this context, the group of belonging is lived out of this need to discover and claim who each one is. Amid the uncertainty that society gives us, a certain psychological security is sought in *rigid* identities, even though the opposite of *liquid* is *solid*. We have great difficulty living with uncertainty, and sometimes it is easier to renounce the risk of freedom of thought, of discernment, and of not being clear about what concrete step to take. It is easy to prefer clear answers and to assume other people's decisions in order to avoid the risk of making mistakes.

The rise of political fundamentalism and a certain style of ecclesial movements and institutions is due to sociological and psychological reasons because it responds to the yearning for unshakable security, for an unwavering identity, and control over a world that is perceived as uncertain. There is a proliferation of groups that are characterized by being very closed in on themselves, with a group identity and a strongly marked ideology, and where the concept of authority is very strong and centered on the leaders. The data of investigations for causes of abuses of all kinds, the multiple ecclesial interventions in new congregations, and the scandals around founders show that this is not the healthiest way to constitute a human group because it "makes apples rot."

Along with these implications of the social moment, it is important to take into account the influence that others exert on us. We are not always aware of our need to be part of something and how this orients us towards conformity with the group to which we belong. The group, to a greater or lesser extent, influences us directly or indirectly and leads us to do what we would not do out of personal impulse, no matter how much we believe that we choose it ourselves. Moreover, it offers us role models that we are encouraged to imitate, even without explicitly verbalizing it. This influence itself is not negative, for it can encourage and foster personal growth; but it can also degenerate into perverse systems.

Social psychology has confirmed the role of the group context in selectively connecting and disconnecting one's moral values. As history has repeatedly shown us, there are different strategies for gaining a person's approval of the system and banalizing wrongful conduct. Making some feel superior to others, training, ideology, or secrecy are some of the many resources used for this aim. We have years of formation, a spirituality that can be objectified as ideology, and it is easy to acquire a certain feeling of superiority with respect to other vocations.

We should be suspicious of certain convictions in Religious Life, such as believing that community decisions are *per se* the best, or overvaluing unity. We cannot forget how easy it is to manipulate a group. As also happens in other areas, such as politics, there are psychological studies that explain what can cause a religious community to choose a leader with psychological tendencies capable of leading to abusive attitudes.

A certain idyllic vision easily leads to the *tyranny of unity*, confusing it with uniformity, where there is no healthy experience of diversity, the right to dissent is lost, and there is a tendency to single thinking. In this *tyranny of unity*, group pressure is the key. To enforce this situation, many or not so subtle ways can be used to dissolve any voice that differs from what is considered normative or to leave aside those who are considered dissonant notes to the whole. In these situations of mistreatment, the silence of the good guys turns everyone into victims and executioners, generating a toxic network of relationships and making any expression of disagreement or censorship of the system into a heroic act.

This is a spiral of silence that turns spectators into accomplices and victims. Thus, evil is normalized, justified, and becomes "someone else's problem." In this way, life becomes

simpler, and there is no running the risk of those who dare to question the *status quo*. The community can be both an accomplice and a victim of a normalized abusive dynamic, since everyone ends up renouncing to be who they are in order not to pay the heavy prices that this implies.

Undoubtedly, many other elements also come into play, elements that are interrelated with each other and can lead us into situations where we do not want to be. We need control systems that are effective in addressing, resolving, and preventing abusive forms of behavior, by advocating in favor of the victims. We will have the Religious Life that we build together; hopefully, we will take advantage of these "signs of the times" to generate structures that will make the women who enter our Congregations freer and more in line with what God dreams of us.

1 These pages are an abridged and simplified version of my article "La presencia innombrada. Abuso de poder en la Vida Consagrada," published in Teología y Vida. In free access at: http://ojs.uc.cl/index.php/tyv/article/view/32715/34801.

2 Francis, Letter of the Holy Father Francis to His Eminence Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Freising (10/06/2021). On-line access: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/20210610-cardinale-marx.html.

3 The Congregation denounces it in no. 22 of the document New Wine in New Wineskins (2017).

# CHANGES IN CANON LAW DEALING WITH ABUSE

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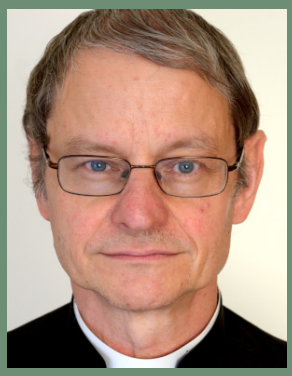

*The lecture was presented in October 2021 at the Canon Law webinar organised by the UISG-USG.*

## 1. Introduction

The revision of Book 6 of the code of Canon Law, which deals with criminal law and its consequences in the matter of abuse, is a complex question that I am going to attempt to present in as clear a fashion as possible. First, I shall locate this revision within the context of the evolution of thinking in the Church as regards criminal law. Next, I shall present the new norms regarding abuses and the penalties with which they are sanctioned. Lastly, I shall offer some brief personal thoughts regarding the implementation of the new system.

To begin with, I would like to emphasize that the revision of Book 6 of the code dealing with criminal Canon Law reflects a radical change in the way in which the Church views criminal law. To sum up the situation, one could say that at the time of the Council canon law (and especially its criminal branch) was viewed as contrary to the commandment to love, so much so that certain theologians suggested suppressing the juridical system of canon law. This suggestion never took place, since the code of 1983 does include a Book 6 that is dedicated to criminal law. However, the prevailing sentiment, even at the start of the 90's, when I studied canon law, was that one ought not to turn to criminal law except in case of dire necessity. Consequently, it was almost never utilized.

Things began to hange as of the 90's, when the first scandals of sexual abuse of minors by clergy became public. Faced with the horror of these actions, people slowly began to perceive that criminal law has its place within the system of canon law and that the

punishment of the authors of sexual abuse perpetrated on innocent individuals made sense, especially to re-establish justice and repair the scandal. The scandal was no longer that the Church punished, but that crimes went unpunished. This was a truly Copernican revolution.

However, things did not change overnight. There is no need for me to expatiate on the temptation that ecclesiastical authorities felt to suppress affairs. However, even where they wished to punish the author of the crime of sexual abuse, there was a lack of means, since the Church was no longer accustomed to sanctioning. It was to help Church authorities enter into this new dynamic that, as of 2001, the "Motu Proprio" *Sacramentum sanctitatis tutela* was promulgated. The competence to judge a certain number of crimes, amongst which the crimes of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, transferred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, so as to help pastors to react in an appropriate manner. This process has taken a long time – profoundly rooted practices cannot be changed at the drop of a hat – but the pace has quickened as the revelations have increased and the need to react has become ever more urgent. As of 2007, it was evident that limiting oneself to adding laws supplementing those present in the Code would not suffice, but rather what was needed was a reform of the Code itself, more precisely Book 6 dealing with criminal law. 2007-2021: this reform of Book 6 took some time. There are various reasons for this, but I shall not dwell on them here. Suffice it to say that I believe that this was useful since, during all those years, the Church never stopped evolving and widening the field of application of criminal law in the matter of abuse. If Book 6 had been revised in two or three years, that would have been too swift, and we would not have benefited from the development that took place in the Church during the decade of the 2010's. The redactors of the new Book 6 have thus been able to take into account these developments and integrate them in their project of revision. At the same time, it was not possible to postpone the revision of criminal law indefinitely on the pretext that things still had to change. Therefore, as of this coming 8 December the new Book 6 will enter into force.

I am not going to offer here the entirety of the new Book 6 of the Code here, but I would like nonetheless to highlight three aspects of its revision. First, certain changes reflect the growing awareness that I mentioned above, that criminal law is useful even for the good of the people of God, who suffer and are scandalized by the impunity that the authors of certain crimes have enjoyed. In this sense, the new version of Book 6 is more severe than the version of 1983. An excellent example is offered by Canon 1341, which deals with the application of penalties. In brief, where the version of 1983 insists on the importance of trying everything before punishing, the new version insists on the obligation to punish when there are no other means to re-establishing justice. The recourse to criminal law is no longer an exceptional procedure, to which one reluctantly turns when there is truly no means of doing anything else, but it is obligatory as soon as it becomes evident that a negotiated solution does not allow for the justice to be re-established and the damage to be repaired.

Another progress effected by the revision of Book 6 has been to guarantee greater coherence in criminal Canon Law, and especially a greater coherence between specific norms and the title under which they appear.

Lastly, the authors of the reform have sought to make the criminal law more effective by specifying the penalty(ies) to be applied in the event of a crime. The legislator of 1983 often referred to the idea of a just penalty, which was theoretically very appealing (in itself, there is every reason to apply a just penalty), but this was of no practical use in punishing, since one did not know what the just penalty was in the particular case. In

the new version of Book 6, the legislator has repeatedly specified what penalty is to be applied, which is something that will facilitate the implementation of criminal Canon Law.

## 2. Description of the Norms

Now that I have offered a brief overview of the revision of Book 6 of the Code, I wish to provide an overview of the norms that deal specifically with the crimes of abuse.

First of all, let me remind readers what the current version of the Code of 1983 envisions on this topic. The fundamental canon here is canon 1395 §2, which says that the cleric who has committed a crime against the Sixth Commandment, if the crime was committed in a violent manner or with threats or in public, or with a minor under the age of sixteen, will be punished with an appropriate punishment that includes, if the case requires it, removal from the clerical state. In other words, the Code envisions sexual abuse committed by a cleric (therefore, a bishop, a priest, or a deacon) as a crime that is canonically subject to sanction no matter what the identity of the person or whether it was done with violence or threats (e.g. rape) or in public (with offense to public decorum), or whether it was the sexual abuse of a minor under the age of sixteen.

This canon 1395 §2 has only very rarely been applied over the years following the Code's coming into force in 1983, whether because the ecclesiastical authorities shrouded an affair in silence in order to safeguard the reputation of the Church or because they were reluctant to impose penalties, given the "anti-canonical" mindset that I mentioned above. Matters began to change as of the 1990s, and the "Motu Proprio" of 2001 *Sacramentum sanctitatis tutela* not only made the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith competent for the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy, but it expanded the field of application of the canon, making it applicable also to minors older than the age of sixteen. In 2010, some new norms for the application of the "Motu Proprio" supplemented it by adding the crime of the sexual abuse of individuals who are mentally incapacitated and the crime of the keeping or spreading of pornographic images of minors under the age of fourteen. Subsequently, other enactments were added, in particular the "Motu Proprio" of 2019 *Vos estis lux mundi r*egarding the obligation of clergy and religious to denounce to the competent ecclesiastical authority those cases of sexual abuse of which they are aware. However, rather than continuing to multiply the norms parallel to those in the Code of 1983, it was decided that it was preferable to integrate these norms in a new version of the Code, taking advantage of the revision of Book 6 of the Code that has been underway since 2007.

## 3. Changes in the Content of Penal Law

Before reviewing the changes in the content of penal law that have been made in the new version of Book 6 as regards abuses within the Church, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the canon regarding the sexual abuse of minors by clergy has changed place within Book 6. The current c. 1395 §2 is located in title 5 of Book 6, which deals with crimes against special obligations. In the revised version of the Code, this crime will be the subject of c. 1398 §1 1°, which is located in title 6 of Book 6 and concerns crimes against human life, dignity, and freedom. This transferral is the result of a felicitous change in the way that the crime of the sexual abuse of minors is viewed. In the Code of 1983, it was viewed first and foremost as a failure to maintain the vow of chastity, if the cleric was religious, or more generally the Sixth Commandment in the case of diocesan clergy.

The basic problem was that the cleric had not respected his obligations. In the revised version of Book 6, the crime is now viewed from the perspective of the victim, whose life and dignity have been gravely damaged. The problem is no longer primarily whether the cleric respected his obligations, but whether he has gravely wronged another person. The transferral of the canon dealing with the sexual abuse of minors by clergy is thus an integral part of the change in mindset of society and the Church, which now shows a primary concern for the victim.

As regards the content of these new norms, they effect a variety changes in the concept of the crime of abuse. Certain norms integrate changes already brought about by the special laws that have been passed since 2001. Others are genuine innovations, even regarding these laws. For clarity of exposition, I intend to review first the changes regarding the object of the crime, next the changes regarding the author of the crime, and lastly the changes regarding the victims of the crime.

As regards the object of the crime, a first change was effected by the new canon 1398 §1 2°, which defines the crime as consisting for a cleric of the recruitment or conducting a minor or a person who normally lacks the use of reason or a person to whom the law recognizes a similar protection to make or participate in real or simulated pornographic displays. This is a new enactment, which takes into account changes in practices and technology. Thus, the cleric who incites a minor to film himself or herself on a computer while in the act of masturbating can – even though he has not committed direct sexual abuse – be punished with the loss of his office or other penalties, which can go as as far as the loss of the clerical status.

On the subject of this new canon, I wish to draw your attention to a problem that is specific to its English translation. This translation speaks of the cleric who “grooms or induces a minor to expose himself pornographically or to take part in pornographic exhibitions”. The word “grooming”, as I understand it, signifies entering into a conversation of a sexual

nature with a minor. For example, it can mean speaking with a minor about his or her sexual organs or inviting the minor to describe how he or she masturbates. That is not what is meant here. The translation of the canon in other languages ("reclutar" in Spanish, "reclutare" in Italian, "recruter" in French) clearly shows that what is meant here is the act of recruiting a minor so that he or she participates in pornographic sessions.

N° 3 of the same new canon 1398 §1 introduces into the Code another crime that is new with regard to the Code of 1983, but which is not an absolute novelty, seeing that this crime had already been established by the norms of 2010 for the application of *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*. It deals with a cleric's maintaining, showing, or sharing in any way whatsoever and by whatever means images of a pornographic nature, which have been acquired in an immoral manner, that depict minors or mentally incapacitated individuals. The text of the new canon is slightly different from that of the norms of 2010: the sharing of pornographic images has been added, and now the pornographic images

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are of any minor, whereas the norms of 2010 spoke of minors under the age of fourteen. The act of downloading pornographic images that show minors or the sharing of such images is now incorporated in the Code as a crime that can be punished with the loss of office as well as other appropriate penalties, including the eventual loss of clerical status.

A third major change regarding the object of the crime is the new §3 of can. 1395, which, aside from the crime against the Sixth Commandment commited by means of violence or threats, already present in the Code of 1983, foresees that "there will be punishment with just penalties, including, if the case requires it, the loss of clerical status, of the cleric who, abusing his authority, commits a crime against the Sixth Commandment or constrains someone to realize or undergo sexual acts." This is a very significant change, which takes into account the scandal arising from the increasing number of revelations of sexual abuse of adults by clergy who have used their status to do so. Up to the present, such acts were blameworthy, but they did not constitute crimes properly speaking. From

now on that will not be the case. A cleric who sexually abuses an adult over whom he exercises a juridical authority will be able to punished – think, for example, of a novice master who sexually abuses a novice. Less obvious for me is the case of a cleric who abuses his spiritual authority (for instance, a spiritual advisor who sexually abuses the young woman whom he advises). It would perhaps be a good idea for the legislator to offer a clear definition of the notion of authority, so that one knows more precisely the limits to the application of the new canon 1395 §3.

In passing, you will have remarked that the legislator has not kept the expression "abuse of a vulnerable person", which occurs for example in the "Motu Proprio" *Vos estis lux mundi*. Clearly account was taken of the criticism expressed regarding this subjective notion (how does one define the vulnerability of a person?) whereas the notion of the authority that one abuses is now objective.

The end of the same §3 of the new canon 1395 introduces another new crime: a cleric's forcing someone to perform or undergo sexual acts. In this instance, as I understand this new norm, the cleric who is the author of the crime is not directly involved in the sexual abuse, but uses his authority or constraint to compel one or more other persons to perform or undergo sexual acts. One could thus imagine the case of a novice master who forces two of his novices to have sexual relations with one another.

## 4. The Innovations of the Revised Version of Book 6 of the Code

Such are the various innovations of the revised version of Book 6 of the Code as regards the object of the crime of abuse. Now viewed by the Code of canon law as crimes are, in short, the recruitment of a minor by a cleric for the purpose of pornographic displays, the keeping, displaying, or dissemination of pornographic images of minors, the contravention of the Sixth Commandment by a cleric who abuses his authority, and the act of forcing someone to perform or undergo sexual acts.

Let us now look at the cases of the enlargement of the field of application of penal law regarding the author of the crime of abuse. The fundamental innovation here, not only *vis-à-vis* the Code of 1983, but also with regard to subsequent laws, is to be found in c. 1398 §2, which stipulates that the member (i.e. not a cleric) of an institution of consecrated life or of a society of apostolic life and any faithful who enjoys a dignity or performs an office or a function within the Church who commits a crime covered by canon 1398 §1 or canon 1395 §3 will be punished by limiting or depriving that person of the exercise of office or with other penalties. Here, too, there is progress in that the Code of 1983 did not envision a crime except in the case of a cleric. The male religious who is not a cleric, the female religious, or the layperson holding a pastoral responsibility who sexually abuses a minor could be subject to disciplinary measures (including removal from the institution, in the case of the male or female religious), but could not be subjected to a canonical penalty properly speaking. As of this moment, these individuals will be able to be punished with one of the penalties envisioned by canon 1336 §§2-4 (to be precise, interdiction from the exercise of an office or removal from office) or other penalties according to the seriousness of the crime. The legislator integrates here another complaint that has been made about current penal law, which dealt only with the clergy. We can see here too an example of the change in perspective that I was just discussing. If one thinks first of all of the violation of an obligation, sexual abuse can be reckoned as more serious if it has been committed by an ordained minister than by a layperson. On the other hand, if one

accords precedence to the victim, this distinction no longer has any reason to exist. For the victim, the sexual abuse is no less serious because it was committed by a religious brother or by a layperson with a pastoral charge.

I close with the widening of the field of application of criminal law so as to take account of the victim of the abuse. Most of the "innovations" here are actually an integration in the Code of enactments already introduced by special provisions since 2001. Thus, the crime of sexual abuse covers not only the abuse of a minor less than sixteen years of age, but the abuse of any minor. Assimilated to the minor, moreover, is the individual who is mentally incapacitated, i.e. suffers from a mental disability. These two extensions of the crime were effected by the norms for applying *Sacramentum sanctitatis tutela* in 2001 and 2010. On the other hand, canon 1398 §1 1° and 2° introduces a third type of possible victim that is completely new: the individual for whom the law recognizes a protection similar to that for minors and the mentally incapacitated. I must confess that I have no idea what the legislator means by this. But it opens the door to the future recognition of other categories of victims whose sexual abuse by a cleric, a religious, or a layperson with a pastoral responsibility will be considered a crime.

Indirectly, another extension of the notion of the victim was effected by the new canon 1395 §3 concerning crimes against the Sixth Commandment through an abuse of authority. In this case, no matter what the age of the victim, the cleric or religious or layperson with a pastoral responsibility who uses his or her authority to sexually abuse someone commits a crime according to Canon Law.

These in my opinion are the main changes introduced by the new version of Book 6 as regards the crimes of abuse. The most important changes, as I see it, are especially the fact of considering the sexual abuse of minors a crime against human life and dignity and no longer as a crime against the vow of chastity: this places the emphasis on the victim. Moreover, it is important that one treats as a crime the sexual abuse of a minor by a non-clerical religious or a layperson with pastoral responsibility (and not only that by a cleric) as well as the sexual abuse of any individual (and not just minors) through an abuse of authority. For me these are the most important changes.

However, it is possible to ask what are the practical consequences of this reform. In certain cases, it will perhaps be merely symbolic. I am thinking, for example, of the extension of the crime to non-clerical religious. It is necessary to know that to date the non-clerical religious who abuses a minor or commits another reprehensible action such as the the downloading of pedopornographic files is already subject to administrative or disciplinary measures on the part of his or her superior and these can include removal from office, interdiction from certain activities (e.g. going on the internet), etc. Henceforth, equivalent penalties will also be possible. Symbolically, this may have significance – I am no longer subject to an administrative measure, but condemned to a penalty, even if the concrete result is the same: whether deprived of office by an administrative measure or condemned by a penalty, I can no longer exercise this office.

Always as regards the religious or (more extensively) the consecrated, it will be necessary to see the repercussions of the changes to the penal law with regard to removal from an institution. As readers are aware, by reason of the current canon 695, the religious who commits one of the crimes mentioned in canons 1395, 1397 and 1398 must be removed from his or her institution unless, in the case of canon 1395 §2, the superior determines that it is otherwise possible to correct the member, to restore justice, and to repair the scandal. In the case of a religious, whether cleric or non-clerical, who has sexually abused

a minor, the superior thus has some margin for discretion. In principle the religious must be removed from the institution. However, the superior can decide that there are other ways to re-establish justice and repair the scandal, especially when the facts date to long ago and the religious is aged. In this case, at least in the Society of Jesus, one does not remove the Jesuit, but imposes restrictive measures on him.

It is necessary to hope that the legislator will not forget to adapt canon 695 to the new numbering system of Book 6. It is to be remembered that removal from an institution is not a penalty – Book 6 does not mention it – but an administrative measure of government. The revision of Book 6 therefore will have no consequences in this regard. That is why I say that extending the notion of a crime to abuses committed by non-clerical religious is primarily symbolic in effect.

On the other hand, extending the crime to the sexual abuse of adults by abuse of authority will have further practical consequences, at any rate for clergy. To date, the cleric who used his authority to sexually abuse an adult might be subject to some disciplinary measures, but it was impossible to remove him from the clerical state. Henceforth, that will be an option.

However, while it is possible, will it really be the case? That raises another question that I have regarding this reform: how will it be implemented? In effect, it is not sufficient to establish that said behaviour is criminal and can be punished with this or that punishment. These punishments need to be able to be applied. Now, it is necessary to know that, up to the present, the legislation concerning the competence of the CDF has not changed. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is therefore not competent for the new crimes introduced into the Code. When an Ordinary receives a complaint regarding one of these new crimes, he will therefore have to open a preliminary inquest so as to establish the likelihood of a crime and then decide whether or not to open a judicial trial before the diocesan tribunal or an administrative trial before the Ordinary himself. This is in fact the same procedure that exists for the crime of the sexual abuse of a minor by a cleric, except that if the preliminary inquest allows the establishment of the likelihood of the crime, then it is not the Ordinary who decide whether the trial is to take place, but rather he forwards the dossier to the CDF so that it can decide what legal action is to follow. In my experience as a prosecutor of the Society of Jesus, I can attest that we have been immensely assisted by the obligation to forward the dossiers to the CDF, so as to have a coherent policy in the matter as well as to deal with the dossiers in an effective manner.

If the implementation of the new penal norms is left to the ordinaries and the diocesan tribunals, there is the risk that it will be a dead letter in many places, both for a lack of motivation and because of a lack of competence on the part of ordinaries and diocesan tribunals. Personally, I wonder whether it would not be better to expand the competence of the CDF to include these new crimes, so as to facilitate the implementation of the new legislation.

**From the Desk of the Executive Secretary**

It is hard to believe that we are now on the other side of the May Assembly which was a wonderful event with 510 general superiors on site and another 174 online. It was quite a feat to stream the proceedings in 14 languages and to have sisters participate and share online while others were working at tables in the Ergife. We are grateful to the communications office and those overseeing technology at UISG for this achievement. The theme "Embracing Vulnerability on the Synodal Journey" and the talks were greatly appreciated. We know that the talks have been used in preparation for General Chapter and continue to be a rich source for congregational reflection. The final session of the UISG Assembly was held online on July 11. Once again there was a very good attendance online and the focus was on the Joint Document of the USG/UISG which was presented to the Synod Office on behalf of the two unions. Sr. Gemma Simmonds CJ, Sr. Maria Cimperman RSCJ and Fr. Orlando Torres SJ presented key aspects of the text and the participants responded to the following questions:

1. What do you want to affirm in the document?
2. What might be missing/need greater emphasis?
3. How can we as UISG members carry the Final Document forward?

It was a rich sharing and will be helpful as we move forward in the synodal process. Since then the *Working Document for the Continental Stage: Enlarge the Space of your Tent* (Is 54:2) has been launched. It is available on the Synod Website in 5 languages. https://www.synod.va/en/highlights/working-document-for-the-continental-stage.html

To continue recording events related to the Synod on November 2, UISG and USG held a webinar onsite and online in which Fr. Giacomo Costa SJ, Sr. Nathalie Becquart XMCJ, shared reflections on the process of writing the document and its overall content. Then Sr. Nadia Coppa ASC and Sr. Dolores Lahr CSJ presented some reflections from the perspectives of UISG and the Joint Response submitted by the two Unions. Br. Emili Turu FMS moderated the session and Sr. Pat Murray IBVM offered some concluding words. If you missed this session it is available on YouTube through the UISG website.

In June a very successful gathering of Sister Theologians was held at Nemi and 20 sisters participated. They are part of a group of younger sister theologians who have been meeting during the Covid period and writing on religious life through the lens of their particular discipline. During their sessions they met with Cardinal Braz de Aviz and Sr. Jolanta Kafka RMI – the then President of UISG. During their time together they focused on how as they

theologians they can contribute to reflection on consecrated life in today's context. The steering group of Maria Cimperman RSCJ, Gemma Simmonds CJ, Julia Prinz VDMF, Paula Jordao VDMF and Pat Murray IBVM met recently to evaluate the whole process in order to move forward with a second group in 2023. If you have sister theologians, under the age of 60, whom you would like to nominate for the new group, please contact Sr. Paula Jordao VDMF at formation@uisg.org.

The UISG community at Caltanissetta completed its mission in June. The UISG Migrants project was launched in 2015 on the 50th anniversary of the foundation of UISG. Its founding aim was to build bridges between the migrants – who were arriving in Sicily in great numbers – and the local population. For the past two years few new migrants have arrived, and the ministry is now one of integration – helping the migrants who have settled in Caltanissetta to flourish in their new home. This is the mission of the local Church and so the sisters have not been replaced and the UISG community in Lampedusa is now the focus of the inter-congregational project. Sr. Florence de la Villeon RSCJ supports the community members and visits them regularly while maintaining contact with those with whom we collaborated in the previous locations – Ramacca, Agrigento and Caltanissetta. However, a second phase of the UISG Migrants Project has been launched with a focus on the establishment of an international network of sisters who work with migrants and refugees in different parts of the world and along multiple borders. This new initative is led by Sr. Carmen Bandeo SSpS, who has been involved in the Sicily project since its early days and who herself spent time in an community near a migrant centre in Greece. Sisters in this ministry will share best practice and identify the spiritual and practical resources that they need to sustain them in this important ministry. Many thanks to the congregations who have sustained this ministry during the past seven years with personnel and financial support.

Some other important moments to remember include the attendance of three sisters at the World Economic Forum in Davos in May. Sr. Mary John Kudiyiruppil SSpS, Sr.Ruth del Pilar Mora FMS and Sr. Pat Murray IBVM had a very simple message to share with representatives of governments and business leaders – *develop partnerships with religious who know the needs on the ground, if you want to bring about substantial and systemic change*. Speaking with and for people who are voiceless, but especially supporting those who feel marginalized to raise their voices, is part of our prophetic way of life.

We were delighted to welcome Sr. Mary John Kudiyiruppil SSpS to UISG as the Associate Executive Secretary in April 2022.

Sr. Gabriella Bottani CMS has handed the leadership of Talitha Kum to Sr. Abby Avelino MM. During these past eight years Sr. Gabriella has led the development of Talitha Kum into a worldwide network of networks (over 90 in total) on all continents. We owe her an enormous debt of gratitude. Several significant meetings of members have been held this year – in September in Bolivia; in October in Thailand; in November in Portugal and Nairobi. Sr. Gabriella was honored for her anti-trafficking leadership by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation at the meeting in Nairobi. Sr. Pat Murray IBVM received the 2022 Outstanding Leadership Award from LCWR in August for her life's work in helping to build peace and justice in Northern Ireland, South Sudan and through current initiatives at UISG.

Finally the staff of UISG, have enjoyed the first two days of a year-long staff development programme. Srs. Pat and Mary John have been busy meeting with various Ambassadors to the Holy See who have expressed an interest in supporting aspects of the work of sisters. Two very interesting meetings were held recently at UISG: one with officials from the FBI and the US State Department and the other with officers from the Dutch Military

Academy. The former wanted to discuss the protection of sisters in areas of conflict because increasingly religious people are seen as "soft" targets by kidnappers. Sadly we have seen the suffering that years of captivity and even torture have inflicted on religious sisters, priests and brothers. It seems important to develop congregational protocols for when incidents happen in areas of conflict. The Dutch military wanted to learn how sisters live and work in areas of conflict, their daily experiences and what sustains them. Sr. Mary John spoke about the current experience of sisters from her congregation in Ukraine and Poland; Sr. Florence de la Villeon shared her experience in the refugee camps in Northern Uganda, Sr. Abby spoke about sisters living in areas where trafficking is endemic and Sr. Pat spoke about her experiences in Northern Ireland and South Sudan. They were particularly interested in the faith perspective of our lives sustains us. In our next issue we will share experiences of sisters who attended COP-27.

As we approach Advent and Lent let us pray for the people of Ukraine:

*Loving God,*
*We pray for the people of Ukraine,*
*for all those suffering or afraid,*
*that you will be close to them and protect them.*

*We pray for world leaders,*
*for compassion, strength and wisdom to guide their choices.*

*We pray for the world*
*that in this moment of crisis,*
*we may reach out in solidarity*
*to our brothers and sisters in need.*

*May we walk in your ways*
*so that peace and justice*
*become a reality for the people of Ukraine*
*and for all the world.*

*Amen.*

(CAFOD-UK)

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