

C-2 Prophetic Stance in Identification and Formation of Leaders

One important question that confronts leadership is: **Who makes the attempt to help whom, at what moment, and in what specific way?** In the search for the answers, we are helped by psychologists at different epochs. To name a few: ¹

Carl Rogers, with his focus on the here and now. His Theory of Personality: has helped us accept the human need to actualize, maintain and enhance all aspects of the individual. Goal of life is growth; “self-actualization”

Abraham Maslow, with his theory that all human beings possess an innate tendency to become self-actualizing; hierarchy of needs “peak experiences.”

Rollo May, with his concept of becoming; fulfilling one’s potential; “transcendence.”

Erik Erickson, with his claim that a person is capable of being a person for others.

Carl Jung, who says that the neurosis of our times results from the loss of spiritual connection with our past and the only cure is renewal of contract with the unconscious forces of personality.

Viktor Frankl who life teaches that being full human means relating to someone or something beyond one’s self. Inner motivation is a search for meaning, which entails forgetting one’s self. The only way to become self-actualizing is through fulfilling a meaning beyond the self.

Leadership aims at the formation of a healthy personality. However, the formation of such a healthy personality is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination. Self-actualization is never a finished or static condition. It is a difficult and sometimes, painful process, one that involves a continuous testing, stretching, and prodding of a person’s capabilities. The lives of self-actualized persons are full of meaning, challenge, and enrichment, and they are truly themselves. They do not live according to the prescriptions and expectations of others. They live fully by experiencing a wide range of positive and negative emotions, as living fully and flexibly in every moment, with spontaneity and freedom. They are helped with empathetic listening, depth of self-exploration is dependent on mutual trust in the helping relationship.

There is certainly nothing wrong with holding up the qualities of Christ, saints and founders, along with theologic principles of spiritual growth; we all need these guideposts and inspiration for their lives. But we also need, if we are actually to develop these same qualities in ourselves and to incorporate these principles into the core of our being, help in learning just how to accomplish this. It is easy enough to decide to become a loving person, and to desire to pray

¹ James J. Gills, SJ. The Development of Persons. Human Development Vol.35, Issue 1.2014.

that spontaneity and generosity like that of Jesus will characterize my own loving service of my neighbor. But who will show me how to go beyond the ideal and understand what concrete steps I have to take to overcome my lack of spontaneity and my deep seated selfishness? Who will help me devise a series of experiences or experiments that will enable me to see such goodness in my neighbors that I will love them intensely and be ready to share with them unsparingly all that God has given me to share? Who knows how to help me concretize the ideals of Christianity so that I can develop the habits that will make them part of my very nature and powerful expressions of my soul?

Most people doing formation work have all the ideals they need; what many would welcome are insights into new, concrete ways of facilitating specific kinds of growth.

To Leadership is entrusted ultimately the ministry of formation: affective maturity that requires the integration of head and heart in the service of others. We can pick out 4 pillars of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral: "The human person as loved and redeemed" ("Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?")

This type of conversion can only be hoped for in the fullness of the Spirit that we are promised to experience, through grace, in eternal life.

Context of formation today: revolutions in technology, internet, varying embraces of globalization, increases in the acceptance of sexual diversity, diminishment of personnel in religious life and priesthood. Yet all these, though urgent and compelling, do not change the one fundamental truth before those charged with training and forming future ministers: The ongoing development of the human person demands attention, and the church must provide it."

The need to probe the elements that comprise a healthy personality continues to call forth informed, intuitive and insightful leadership. This is the responsibility of provincials and directors of formation. The first sign of an intelligent person is the ability to know what is not known. Openness to learn and understand!

"Challenge for leadership: new wine in new wineskin! Open to new learnings, new ways of thinking, new patterns of relationships, new understanding of the world/universe/cosmos and new experiences of God. " (Carol Zinn, SSJ. HD, V35, Fall 2014 p.30-31). Sister Carol continues: the process of human development is holy and holistic, complex, comprehensive, collaborative. All that goes in the larger global world impacts the inner world of the human being. The new wine of insights, discoveries, revelations and ideas abound. Creating new opportunities for the new wine of today's young people who offer their skills and talents so we can reap the fruit seems appropriate and responsible. Ignoring this new wine seems less responsible. Trying to pour this new wine into old wineskin seems futile.

Dialogue across boundaries of perspective, experience and role demands a freedom of inquiry, a maturity of self, and a desire for transformation.

Experiments for growth

One skill that leaders need is to dare to do experiments for growth. Policies and leadership decisions, particularly about assignments and living arrangements influence growth of individuals. Organization dynamics impact growth of members. They consist of (1) policies that guide decisions for organization and individuals to achieve the mission. (What is prohibited, what is encouraged...) Leader insight into personality dynamics of members. (2) ministry assignment: good for minister and ministry. e/g/ addictive behavior; drinking, etc... (3) Living arrangements: environment conducive to growth and personal transformation . Balance between communal participation and privacy; engagement and connectedness.²

Present-day Challenges: advances in technology and communications, evolving and often fragmenting family and social structures, increased suspicion and skepticism of institutions and authority focuses on self, choice and consumption have been going on for generations.

Apt symbol of the culmination of these dangers is the smart phone which facilitates human communication across a variety of media platforms, including phone call (sounds) e-mail, text message, FB, Instagram, Twitter, etc. Its apps are not only reflection of one's personal values and interests but can also serve those that may be good and helpful for human growth and integration. Youth of today need more nurturance to successfully attain adulthood, with the right attributes and tools in place to live well and happily. "Accompaniment"

Formees come with paradoxical blend of self-confidence and insecurity, great facility for communications technology but more marginal interpersonal communications skills; ability and desire to display for the world mundane and personal aspects of their lives while struggling with self-disclosure and intimacy. Older members are also "quite unfinished". WE need to deepen our capacity for empathy, listening, self-disclosure and intimacy, Workshops to deal with conflict and "difficult personalities"

We are never finished adults. We remain ever in need of growth, change and conversion—pilgrims in the church and forever "on the way."

A call for greater emphasis on contemplation and more mindful and practical commitment to the evangelical counsels.

"Plugged in" world creates new neural pathways so powerful that we can experience symptoms of withdrawal similar to those under drug. Symptoms as anxiety or inability to concentrate. ADHD /anxiety

Days to be unplugged: retreat, recollection

² Fr. John Celichowski, OFM Cap. From Human Development, Vol. 35 Issue 3, Spring 2015

Choices: limit scope of choices: cereals, personal effects; Age of personal choices and self-expression: renew commitment to religious obedience as dialog that will submit to elected leaders.

Sexual assaults: glory God in our body; holy respect for God, others and self.

Well one day, a caterpillar was speaking to a butterfly.

"Tell me, said the caterpillar: "What is a butterfly?"

"it's what you are meant to become, replied the butterfly. It flies with beautiful wings and joins the earth to heaven. It drinks only nectar from flowers and carries the seeds of love from one flower to another, without butterflies the world would soon have less flowers, said the butterfly.

The caterpillar replied: "it can't be true. How can I believe there's a butterfly inside you or me when all I see is a fuzzy worm?"

So how does one become a butterfly?"

"Well, said the butterfly, "you must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar."

"You mean to die?" asked the caterpillar?

"Yes and no,," The butterfly answered. "What looks like you will die but what's really you will still live. Life is changed not taken away. Once you are a butterfly you can really love the kind of love that makes new life. It's better than all the hugging caterpillars can do. So if you want to be a prisoner in that fuzzy outfit of yours, I guess, that's up to you. But you don't have to. You too can become a butterfly."

Every beginning needs an ending. Transition takes place within us. Let go.

Yearning for a new way will not produce it, Only ending the old way can do that. You cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new. The old will defy the new; the old will deny the new; the old will decry the new. There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it.

Allow me then to reflect on this topic in the context of Consecrated Life Today. I borrow liberally from the thoughts of Pope Francis and members of his Curia.

In the Beginning...

478 years ago this year. Who would imagine that your Congregation could remain relevant and strong? Whereas sociologists claim that religious life has a 300p-tear life cycle, you have withstood the test of time. Those congregations that have refounded, re-configured, renewed have drawn inspiration and are refreshed from their beginnings...

The papacy of Pope Francis has infused new energies to consecrated life. The celebration of the year of Consecrated Life, and now, the Jubilee Year of Mercy have spurred us deeper into our

consecration as men and women,” *Wake up the world! Leave your nests. Go to the peripheries. Be courageous! Be humble as persons of communion.*”

Through the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis asks us to remember the past with gratitude: recall our origins, see the hand of God there for our Congregation. Specific grace, for specific mission, with specific companions. A fundamental call to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, reading the signs of the times, responding creatively to the needs of the Church!

How shall we begin to know who God is if we do not begin ourselves to be something of what God is? We receive enlightenment only in proportion as we give ourselves more and more completely to God by humble submission and love. WE do not first see, then act; we act, and then see.” (Thomas Merton)³

CONSECRATED PERSONS TODAY

WHO are you? WHERE are You? HOW are you? WHY are you where you are? You are being asked again and again, as you try to give new expressions to the charism of St. John of God in your particular context and in your particular communities. Gatherings, such as this, are an opportunity to work for, and experience, a union of mind and heart in seeking and doing the will of God; attentiveness to God’s voice within you in discernment and dialogue, responding to the realities of today’s world; deeper appreciation of your legacy and the living out of Hospitaller spirituality.

It is also an opportune moment to ask what Religious Life is NOT before we could define what it is NOW. The Second Vatican Council’s teaching on Religious Life definitively laid aside an understanding of Religious Life that was common in the Church among both laity and Religious for hundreds of years, namely, that Religious Life was a superior form of Christian life, inferior to the clergy but superior to the laity, Vatican II stated very clearly that both parts of this understanding were erroneous.

First, the distinction clergy/laity has nothing to do with Religious Life because ordination is about office in the church and Religious Life is not an office but a state of consecrated life. And second, Vatican II was clear that all members of the Church, whether clergy or lay, whether in a state of consecrated life or not, are called to the fullness of Christian perfection and to one and the same holiness. While this was a welcome change, many underwent disorientation and identity crisis.

Consecrated Life has different forms, as given in Canon Law. There are “apostolic Religious Life”, as distinct from monastic Religious Life or from Secular Institutes, or the hermit or consecrated virgins who do not enter the Order or Congregations.

³ Thomas Merton, as quoted by Sister Gilmory Bauer. “Power: a Capacity for Grace”, HD, Summer 2015

Sandra Schneiders, in her talk to religious men and women at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA), Manila last January 2015, called Consecrated Life as “ministerial Religious Life”. This life form is intrinsically apostolic and intrinsically contemplative. With this distinction, Schneiders then defines Ministerial Religious Life as a Christian prophetic lifeform, given to the Church by the Holy Spirit for the sake of the world, and constituted by perpetual Profession of consecrated celibacy, evangelical poverty and prophetic obedience lived in transcendent community and ministry.⁴

The first element in this definition is its being lifeform. Using an analogy from organic life, Schneiders describes religious life as one which possesses an internal dynamism, which makes for unity and growth. Religious life is capable of changes as it passes through the stages of development, yet remains the same in its identity. It has a public character, a recognizable lifeform that can define itself within the context of Church understanding, and that the perpetuity of the life commitment of its members arises from the life itself.

Secondly, ministerial Religious Life is specifically a Catholic Christian lifeform. Jesus Christ is at its center—followed, believed, and confessed. The Gospel is the rule of life and the Spirit holds the community together, energizing it in its ministry. Trinitarian and Christocentric in character, the religious observes Christian morality, sacramental practice and participates actively in the Catholic community.

The third distinctive description is its intrinsic mystical prophetic nature. The religious’ inspiration is drawn from the Gospels—leaving everything behind, responding to Jesus’ call, becoming his fulltime companions in ministry, sharing his itinerant lifestyle, and living in common. Religious Life is not an office or an official function within the Church structure delegated by the hierarchy. It is non-hierarchical, egalitarian, communitarian and ministerial. This was affirmed by Cardinal Joao Dinis de Avis of CICLSAL in his address to FABC-OCL in Pattaya, Thailand last July 2015, when he said that both the hierarchical and charismatic forms in the Church are equal: one is not subservient to the other; both are equally important for the Life and Mission of the Church.

Clearly, Religious Life is not a human initiative but a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. This explains the charismatic dimension of Religious Life and its purpose. It is given to the Church for the sake of the world, to help the church to truly be a “light for the nations.” Religious life can offer two major services to the Church: to be its outreach beyond the institutional boundaries, and to be clear witness to the true nature of the Church in service of the world.

Thus, through the impetus of Pope Francis, religious life can wake up the world to the Joy of the Gospel!

Distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. We are called to be credible witnesses of God’s mercy and compassion.

⁴Consecrated Women and Men: Wake up the World. ICLA. January-March 2015. Pp. 57ff

Prophets know God and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and announce the HOPE in God and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God; have no interest other than God. Prophets are on the side of the poor and the powerless for they know that God himself is on their side.

Be witnesses of God's love, rekindle the hope of the world. (Pope Francis)
And hope does not disappoint us, for the love of God has been poured into our hearts!
(Rom.5:5)

Who Is The Consecrated Person?

Consecrated Life is a gift of God to the Church. The counsels are a divine gift, which the Church received from its Lord, and which it always safeguards with the help of his grace (LG, n.43). Pope Francis made the same affirmation: "Consecrated Life is a gift to the Church, born of the Church, grows in the Church and entirely directed to the Church."⁵ As such, consecrated life is not an isolated or marginal reality, but deeply a part of the Church. The Church without consecrated women and men is unimaginable! Wake up the world! Pope Francis means, that we are to be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living.⁶ Wake up the world! Illuminate it with prophetic and countercultural witness.⁷

Here we see that being Prophetic witnesses is intrinsic to being consecrated persons. We can only wake up the world by being prophetic. Being witnesses of being and doing, of relating and serving; in short, being counter-cultural witnesses. Religious become prophets who witness to how Jesus lived, according to the way of discipleship, i.e., keeping alive through their day-to-day communal life Jesus' celibacy for the Reign of God, kenotic poverty, and obedience to the Father, by which they witness to the primacy of God. The prophetic witness is needed by today's world which is in deep sleep, unconcerned about the sufferings of the poor, marginalization of more and more people, widespread injustice and corruption, growing environmental problems, the Cry of Mother Earth as our Common Home; a world which is groping in the dark for answer to life's fundamental questions and for the source of authentic and lasting joy.

What are the fundamental guidelines to carry this out? (1) Put Christ at the center; (2) Start from the Gospel (3) Leave your nest and go to the margins.

Put Christ at the center of your existence

(For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Phil.1:21)

⁵Bishop J.M. Bergoglio, Intervention at the Synod on Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World, XVI General Congregation, 13 Oct 1994.

⁶Spadaro, "Be True Prophets," L'Osservatore Romano, Engl ed (10Jan2014) p.6.

⁷Francis, Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life.

The lives of the prophets, as described in the Scriptures, are completely caught up in the concerns of God, in mission Dei. They are to constantly listen to and communicate the message of God to the people. For this, they need to be intimate with Him, converse with Him, understand and interiorize His plan for the people, love those whom He loves, desire what He desires for those He love, and communicate what He wants to communicate.

The Religious are to follow Christ intimately, radically and prophetically; and this is essential to their mission and the basis of their identity. This means to live according to His form of life, to participate in His mission, to continue His ministries and to keep His prophetic presence alive and effective.⁸

Always start from the Gospel

(Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Mt.28.19)

The ultimate norm of religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospel. The particular charism of an Institute of Consecrated Life is a concentration of the whole Gospel through a specific aspect of Jesus' life and ministry. In this way, the charism is a living exegesis of the Gospel. Hence, the Gospel is the Institute's fundamental and highest rule. The Gospel is to be translated into daily actions marked by simplicity and coherence, and have it as the solid ground on which we proceed courageously, with our prophetic life and mission. Pope Francis reminds us that fidelity to the Gospel will keep our life and mission young and render it current and attractive.⁹

Leave your nest and head for the margins of humanity today

(The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor... Lk. 4:18f)

We, religious, are prophets and missionaries; and the Holy Father wants us to be so in and from the margins. We are called to be in the peripheries and be in communion with the excluded and those driven away from the economic, political and cultural centers of power. And from these peripheries, proclaim the Gospel of liberation, justice and peace, as the prophets for the Covenant did before. To be able to do this, we need to be discerning as to the novelties of the Spirit, lucid in recognizing the new frontiers, recognizing the limits and appropriate manner by which to proceed, immersed in the realities of today, touching the suffering Christ in others.¹⁰ This was strong in St John of God and his first companions, right from the beginning.

What are the basic attitudes? Be joyful. Be brave! Be persons of communion!

(Be glad in the Lord at all times. Phil.4.4)

⁸Samuel H. Canilang, Wake up the World. ICLA Monographs #16, p. 43.

⁹Ibid., p.44.

¹⁰Ibid. p. 45.

Pope Francis' continuing message is the joy that comes from accepting, living, and communicating the Gospel. Show everyone that you follow Jesus and put his gospel into practice, filling your heart with happiness. Infect those who are near you with this joy. Then people will ask you for the reason and feel the desire to share the same joy with you. The authentically joyful person cannot but share the same joy with others. Joy is a gift, and as such is to be shared freely and fully with others!¹¹

The Holy Spirit grants us the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness in very time and place, even when it meets with opposition. With complete trust in God, we can be fearless. We can be open to new ways of serving God. We can be innovative, work wonders, try the untried, as we may be urged by the Spirit.

Communion and mission are profoundly interconnected. Our fraternal life in community is a very concrete and important contribution to the whole Church of communion which heals, promotes life-giving relationships, after that of life in the Trinity.

Prophecy as a Distinctive Sign of Consecrated Life

Isaiah 21:11: Someone keeps calling me: "What is left of the night?" Isa. 42:6-7; Isa 21:11-12; Jer 1:4-5

Prophecy is a distinctive sign of consecrated life. The religious are called to be prophets by demonstrating how Jesus lived and to proclaim how the Reign of God could come about.

Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of dawn (Isaiah 21: 11-12). Prophets know God and the others who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side.¹²

For Pope Francis, the priority of Consecrated Life is Prophecy of the Kingdom. This is non-negotiable.

"A religious must never give up prophecy!" There is a new call for religious to rekindle the prophetic spirit of their life and mission. Religious are more than a resource in the Church. They are a prophetic presence and witness in the Church. They will continue to be so.¹³

It's time to start a new phase in religious life, more inspired by Jesus and structured to serve prophetically at the service of the Reign of God. What matters is not so much the observance, but following of Jesus. It is not the structure but the prophetic Spirit. It is not the number but

¹¹Ibid. p. 45.

¹²Francis: Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life. N.II.2

¹³Mary Lou Wirtz, "Repentance and Conversion" as cited by Canilang, ICLA # 16. p 54.

the quality of evangelical life that the community radiates. The renewal that the Church needs today will not come by institutional paths, but by paths opened by the prophetic Spirit.¹⁴

The prophetic witness is life lived intensely. It radiates outwardly its interior fullness. Living intensely implies unity of life, consistency between what one announces and what one lives. It is communication from one's personal God-experience that leads to conversion and integral transformation. It is incarnating the Gospel values which Jesus proclaimed: his love and compassion for the poor, the sick and the lowly. It is proclaiming the Good News in season and out of season, denouncing evil, healing the sick so that all may have abundant life.

For our witness to be prophetic we need to undergo a process of renunciation for the sake of transformation. Sr. Liliane Sweko makes this appeal:

As prophets, we religious must learn today to renounce our own securities, our own compromises with the powerful and the rich. If we are to be credible we must renounce all that prevents us from being authentic bearers of hope, faith and charity... Prophetic by our vows, we must renounce in all its forms, and ownership that disfigures the image of God in human beings.¹⁵

Religious Life as an Alternate World

To be faithful to our charism, our form of life should be concrete, dynamic and contextualized. That means offering to the world an alternative way of living and relating with the whole of creation.

Profession is a unitary act which a religious formally and solemnly makes in public for the rest of one's life. It is perpetual, not by law, but by nature. The three-fold vows, though distinct from one another, are inseparable aspects of self-gift, and together, they shape a life and create an "alternate world" or a reality construction within.

Consecrated Celibacy is the central vow of Religious Life, for it expresses the total, non-mediated self-gift to Christ and witness to the integrity of the relationship. Evangelical poverty enables the religious to imitate Jesus, the "poor one of Yahweh" who depended on God's providence and also to share the use of material resources with others that they may know that God's reign has indeed, come. Prophetic obedience is not about subservience or mindless abnegation or personal responsibility. It is about exercising power and freedom like Jesus—listening, discerning God's will at all times, and not looking for self-promotion or self-preservation.

Sandra Schneiders presents religious life as an alternate world, with its own economic and political systems shaped by evangelical poverty and prophetic obedience. The religious community incorporates radical equality among the members to whom they minister, real

¹⁴Jose Antonio Pagola, as cited by Canilang, Ibid. p. 55

¹⁵Lilian Sweko. Vidimusdominum.org. as cited by Canilang. Ibid. p. 57.

celibate itinerancy (renunciation of family and home), common purse (total economic interdependence) and non-accumulation of either personal or corporate wealth. In this way, they create, in the actual historical situation of the earthly present, a sociological life-form that is the alternate world, the Reign of God that Jesus preached and lived with his first disciples.¹⁶

The vow of celibacy is the central vow because it definitively shapes the person's capacity for relationship which is the most important dimension of personhood. Who do we love and how we love ultimately determines who we become and the quality of our life.

The vow of poverty is a commitment to the living of an alternative economic system in the midst of the worldly economic systems—i.e., commodity/market economies, based on the value of having—that have, over the course of history, oppressed and dehumanized the vast majority of people, the poor of this earth, for the benefit of the rich. By the vow of poverty, religious undertake to live an alternative economy—i.e., gift economy based on the value of being—in which no one is rich and no one is poor. This has a profound effect on their relationship with God, their community life, their mission and ministry, and as a result on the witness they give in the world to the Reign of God.¹⁷

By the vow of obedience, Religious undertake to construct and live an alternate political system. Christianity was born in a political system of oppressive colonization. It has lived through systems of empire, feudalism, sovereign states, totalitarian regimes, dictatorships and democracy. Different from each other as these systems were, they were all primarily structures of domination, based on hierarchy, in which the powerful control the disempowered for the advantage of the former. Religious, in their vow of obedience, undertake to create and live a different kind of political life in which there is no hierarchy, in which all participate as equals, where coercion is not the normal *modus operandi* of leaders and nor is heteronomous submission the way of the members. This new way of organizing power for the empowerment of all affects in radical ways the relationships of religious with God, with one another in community, and with those they serve in ministry, and as a result gives prophetic witness to a new reality that is coming into being—the Reign of God in this world.¹⁸

(Jn. 13:35.) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Religious life is lived out in community and ministry. For the longest time, religious communities have lived their life as a total institution, with a strong emphasis on uniformity, control and efficiency. The renewed theology of Vatican II on Religious Life has posted challenge for them to approach community life differently.

“Transcendent community” describes the free, voluntary life, they are able together that is chosen by the Religious. Because of their shared love of Jesus in community they are able to

¹⁶Sandra Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, p. 187, as cited by Canilang. Ibid. pp66-67

¹⁷Ibid., p. 67-68.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 68

transcend or go beyond the ordinary bases for being together—be it cultural, racial, economic, political, or affective reasons.

Love is the main motivation of religious commitment. Ministry is an expression of love of God and all of creation. In a way, this makes the religious' service "world-bound". *Gaudium et Spes* has redirected the Church's attention towards the world—to dialogue with it, participate in its affairs, to "re-engage" it, for God so loved the world and sent the only Son for its sake (John 3:16).

Religious life is *signum fraternitatis*, a sign of communion in the Church and for the world, called to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures. Despite the advanced and sophisticated means of communication and transportation in this globalized world, there is growing experience of isolation, of mutual suspiciousness, mistrust and defensiveness. And consecrated men and women are not unaffected by these tendencies and experiences. Thus, Pope Francis exhorts us to rediscover our fundamental communion, to promote the mystique of living together. He teaches us that we find true healing in contemplative fraternity, in fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others.¹⁹

The life of communion of the Religious has two inseparable dimensions: communion with God and communion among themselves and with others. The Year of Consecrated Life provides us a special opportunity to delve anew into the deep meaning of our fraternal life in community and to renew our commitment to it. When we are faithful to the gospel and to the charismatic meaning of our fraternal life in community, Community truly becomes the first and most believable gospel that we can preach.

We are asked to discover the responsibility of being prophecy as community...to live in the light of the loving relationship of the Trinity, the model for all interpersonal relationships. Religious are called to be experts in communion.

Where there is community, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is community and every kind of grace. The Holy Spirit, who is the very heart of community, molds the consecrated life in its multiple forms of fraternal life. Indeed fraternal communion is constitutive of the spirituality of the Religious.

Our fraternal communion becomes the locus of the Gospel, when we secure a space for God in our everyday life. Living spirituality of communion is recognizing our diversity and cultivating our complementarity. Communion is not uniformity and does not reduce any member to anonymity. On the contrary, communion highlights and promotes personal identity and uniqueness. Communion is unity in diversity, where all members are partakers of the same common charism and mission.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 103-104

Religious community is heterogeneous, intergenerational, and intercultural. It brings together people of different ages, personality types, mentalities, cultural backgrounds, professional training, etc., Hence, the inevitable conflicts and difficulties inherent in common life. Yet, fraternal community has an enormous power to call people together. But there is in every human person the longing for communion....Something is missing in community if there is no conflict. A life without conflict is not life. Conflicts are inevitable and have to be faced appropriately. Yet criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility have no place in our houses.²⁰

PROPHETIC WITNESSES OF HOPE

The Church does not have a mission. God's mission has a church. The Church that Pope Francis envisions is one that is thoroughly missionary; that heads forth to the peripheries; that together with the marginalized, announces the Gospel and the salvific liberation and transformation for all. In the process of fulfilling her prophetic mission, she is willing to be hurt, bruised, dirtied.²¹

Religious, as Missionaries are to be Prophets of HOPE at the margins. "Leave your nest and go to the neediest, the poorest...there where the need for the Light of the Gospel is greatest." By margins, these are both geographical frontiers and existential peripheries. Doing mission from the margins is different from doing mission from the center of power, of position, of privileges, where those at the margins are considered recipients and not as agents of missionary activity.

These people at the margins could be the men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine. They could be the indigenous people whose very culture and identity are threatened by ecological destruction.

Prophets of Hope are called to be antennas ready to collect the waves of newness generated by the Holy Spirit. As such they can help the community assume the sensitivity and discover new and courageous ways to reach everyone.²²

Called to be experts in communion, where cultures and faiths vary, the prophets of hope could be links in building up intercultural communities, or inter-congregational communion of charisms, or inter-vocational synergies with other lifeforms in the Church, or expanding toward ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. The Asian Church values communion, harmony, dialogue. The Asian Church has its own unique way of being and doing mission. To whom much is given much is expected in return.

²⁰Ibid.; Landas # 38-55

²¹EvangeliiGaudium n.49

²²Op cit. Canilang, pp 106-108.

Pope Francis, at the closing of the Synod on the Family last October, 2015, warns us against two temptations in the Church: first, a “**spirituality of illusion**, where we can walk through the deserts of humanity without seeing what is really there; instead, we see what we want to see...We are capable of developing views of the world, but we do not accept what the Lord places before our eyes.”

Second, Francis spoke of **scheduled faith**, “we are able to walk with the People of God, but we already have our schedule for the journey, where everything is listed.”

“We know where to go and how long it will take; everyone must respect our rhythm and every problem is a bother...We run the risk of becoming the ‘many’ in the Gospel about the blind Bartimaeus, who lose patience and rebuke the blind man. (Mark 10:46-52)

Consistently, Pope Francis’ message for us is clear: We are to follow “Jesus who wants to hear people’s need. “...Jesus, who wants to talk with each of us about our lives, our real situations, so that nothing is kept from him.”²³ There where people suffer is the place of Consecrated Persons. There where people are, are we called to be witnesses of Hope!
(Jn. 15:9. As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you: remain in my love.)

The world will never run out of its need for mercy. The 15th century when the midlifer John first responded to the call, has not grown any better in many ways. Cardinal Walter Kasper, in his book just off the Claretian press, *MERCY*, writes that in the 21st century, we live with the threat of ruthless terrorism (*as what happened in Paris, in Mali, in Egypt and the counter air strikes from France and Russia and Euro coalition*), outrageous injustice, abused and starving children, millions of refugees in flight, increasing persecution of Christians and—in addition—devastating natural catastrophes in the form of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, floods, droughts. All of that and much more are the “signs of the times....In the face of the vicious circle of evil, there can be hope of a new beginning only if we can hope in a gracious, merciful, and simultaneously all-powerful God, who alone can establish a new beginning, who alone can give us the courage to hope against all hope, and who can grant us the strength for a new beginning.”²⁴

Dear Brothers, this new beginning is happening now...here...with you—Hospitaller Brothers, Prophetic Leaders and Witnesses of Hope! Remember: “We find LIFE by giving life, LOVE by giving love, HOPE by giving hope.”

Conclusion

Pope Francis opened the Door of St. Peter’s Basilica to usher in the Jubilee Year of Mercy. So did other Churches in different parts of the world. We were asked to receive personally the mercy of God; to extend our mercy to those who have sinned against us, to become missionaries of mercy. “Let us entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy that she turn her gaze

²³National Catholic Reporter Website, 26 October 2015.

²⁴Cardinal Walter Kasper. *Mercy. The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life.* Claretian. 2015. p.xv,5.

upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our year-long journey, your Chapter journey, with an open heart. Let this be my prayer for and with you! (an adapted version from Pope Francis Prayer for the Year of Mercy):²⁵

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”
You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified...
Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that every member of the Family of St. John of God, every leader at different levels of leadership, can be renewed in his enthusiasm to bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
restore sight to the blind,
live and serve You and your people as Prophetic Witness of Hope.
We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy,
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

*Epilogue*²⁶

In the Heart of the Hunter, Laurens van der Post describes a poignant scene in the midst of the Kalahari Desert. He is camped there with local Bushmen and they are sitting around a campfire. The absence of any artificial light allows for a world of complete darkness once one moves beyond the campfire. The stars hang low in the sky, their brilliance not only seen but heard. Laurens van der Post describes the sound of the stars as “this intense electric murmur at one’s ears.” Then he sees the outline of a Bushwoman holding her young infant up to the stars. She is singing some kind of chant and has her face lifted to the sky.

When van der Post asked the local bushmen what the woman was doing, he was told that she was asking the stars to take the heart of her child and to give him “something of the heart of a star in return...because the stars have heart in plenty...”The heart of the stars is a hunting heart, one that seeks with courage and finds the nourishment which is needed for life. When I read this explanation, I thought of all of us who have been in darkness. I thought of our own hearts and how, when we are gradually coming back to light, it is as though we have a “child” within us coming to birth.

²⁵Pope Francis, Prayer for the Year of Mercy, Dec 8, 2015 –Nov 20, 2016.

²⁶Joyce Rupp, OSM.Little Pieces of Light, 1994. Pp.63-64.

This “child” may be a new way of living or loving, a deepened sense of self-esteem, a turning over of our old ways, a ripening of our ideas or beliefs, a wisdom that has come from our grieving, or any other thing that is fresh and new for us. If only we could, as the Bushwoman did, take this “child” within us trustingly and hold it in our open hands. We could lovingly hold up whatever is waiting to be born in us, asking that this newness within us be blessed with the heart of the stars. We could pray that we receive a “hunting heart” so that we seek with courage and live with trust, believing that what we need for our soul will be given.

We carry our greatest treasure within us: a piece of light which will forever shine; radiance which is always lighting our way home. Let us trust this light. It will never go out.

Guide for Personal Reflection (You can choose any of these questions for your personal reflection and sharing)

1. How is the Gospel truly a manual for our daily living and decision-making? How open are we to be challenged by it?
2. How do our vision and zeal consume us? How has our charism been lived over the years: the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways by which those difficulties were surmounted?
3. Are our ministries, our works, and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of St. John of God? Are these ministries and works suitable for carrying out today in society and in the Church?
4. How are our communities as prophetic witnesses of HOPE?
5. What is this “new child” waiting to be born in us at this Asia-Pacific Conference?

Pope Francis never ceases to surprise and startle all of us by his direct and often blunt honesty. What part of his message or witness has most “stretched” you or made you uncomfortable? Prophets spoke the message they felt compelled to proclaim and for that, suffered rejection. Have I been “prophetic” in my own Province/delegation? How am I, my province/congregation trying to move from “maintenance” to “mission”?

Transformed people can transform structures and systems. Hope rises up for all because when truth and power meet, all is different!