



# Lasallian Reflections

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## "With a Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity"

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*Working paper for the International Congress on Consecrated Life.  
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### INTRODUCTION

#### I. At the beginning of the XXI century

1. Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, the Mediator of the New Covenant and of the Kingdom, is our contemporary. He does not belong to the past, nor is consecrated life, our form of Christian living, a thing of the past. Currently, in some countries consecrated life is dramatically impacted by the phenomenon of aging, yet in other places the average age of religious is much lower. In recent years new forms of monastic and religious life have been added to the century-old forms we know. Some of the charisms that arose centuries ago have taken on new aspects that give them new vitality. After Vatican Council II, consecrated life received a great impetus and underwent important changes. Present socio-cultural and religious contexts demand even more decisive transformations. In the midst of many contemporary changes we perceive the validity and the relevance of the important values that constitute our form of life and we also feel the urgency of living these values in an intense and significant way for ourselves and for others. We are living in a time of grace and challenge.

2. The passion that Christ felt for humanity, shown throughout his lifetime, and in a singular



way on the Cross, is also not something of the past. It continues down through all of history, where we find clear signs of its fruitfulness. At the beginning of the XXI century, Christ shares the crosses of millions of persons in various parts of the world. Today, his call for consecrated men and women is demanding and life giving. It is a call to follow him passionately and, motivated by his compassion, to share his passion for each human being.

## II. The Congress

3. We want to be attentive to the voice of God, to the teachings of Jesus and to the urgings of the Spirit that constantly open up new horizons and prompt us to a new evangelization. We want to be attentive to the challenges which the Church places before us, attentive to the needs of present day society and attentive to the needs of consecrated life. That is why representatives of consecrated life from throughout the world will gather together in this Congress. We want to listen to these voices from an intercultural perspective, careful to include the perspectives of men and women. We want to bring to this task all of our experience as superiors general, presidents of national and continental conferences, women and men theologians, directors of centers for theological reflection on consecrated life, and editors of reviews on consecrated life. The young religious present will contribute their enthusiastic faith which is attuned to present-day cultural values. We want to continue the reflection and discernment which began with the Synod on Consecrated Life and to discover the new things that the Spirit is bringing to life in us (Is 43:18-19) at the beginning of the third millennium (VC 13). From these foundations we wish to offer some proposals and practical steps to rekindle our hope and sustain us along the path that the Spirit is leading us.

### *a) Objectives of the Congress*

4. *The overall objective* of the Congress is to discern together, with global awareness, what the Spirit of God is bringing about among us, where the Spirit is leading us, and how we can respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7).

5. This objective is composed of the following *particular objectives*:

- to discover and discern the validity of the new that is appearing among us;
- to accept and promote this newness as a gift from God and an expression of commitment;
- to strengthen the spirituality and mission shared with the People of God and to foster

communion and solidarity among the men and women of consecrated life;

- to commit ourselves to sharing our passion for Christ and for humanity in new contexts: consecrated life is urged to cultivate a “passion” for God and for human beings and to make it a priority (VC 84);
- to be the voice of consecrated life for consecrated life.

### *b) The method and the spirit of the Congress*

6. The objectives of the Congress are concretised in this Working Paper, which is an expression of a serious and ongoing team effort. Prior to developing this document, an announcement of this Congress on Consecrated Life was sent out along with four questions that would help us discover signs of vitality, challenges, obstacles and dreams. A “Visioning Group” analysed the answers received from the questionnaires and then worked to focus the theme of the Congress, its inspiration, objectives and process. Now the “Theological Commission” offers this Working Paper that, remaining faithful to the replies received, aims to offer a creative synthesis that reflects certain intuitions for future directions. This *Working Paper* is being sent to all the participants in the Congress for their reactions and contributions to its enrichment. During the Congress itself the participants will delve deeper into the themes, which will be developed through the various conferences, interchanges and proposals.

7. The *Working Paper* that we are presenting only seeks to guide the preparation of proposals that are likely to arise from our global and shared discernment during the Congress. In this Working Paper we present the different elements, areas or aspects that may help to focus or direct our work.

8. We deeply desire to express the “spirit” of the Congress which inspires all its particular “components” in the following verbs or dynamic attitudes that have inspired us in the writing of this document: welcoming, transforming, beginning anew, celebrating.

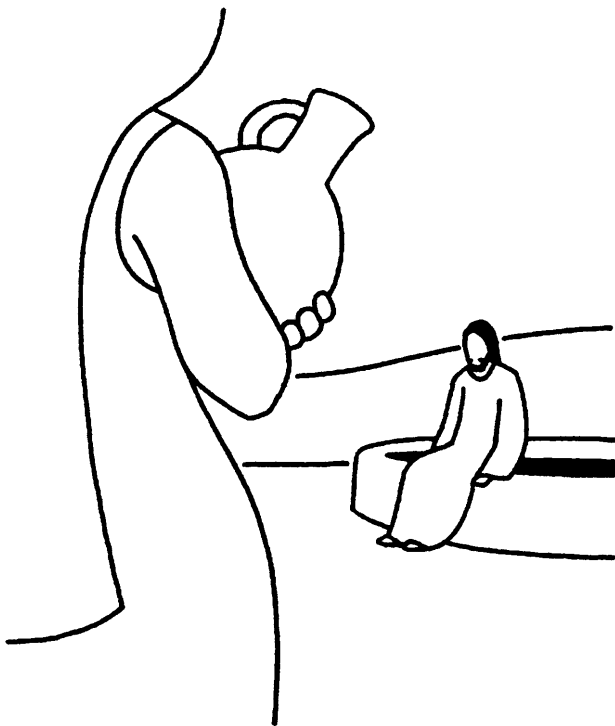
- *Welcoming*: implies seeing, discovering, listen-

ing to what the Spirit offers and perceiving how the Gospel moves us to respond.

- *Transforming*: implies openness to learning and discerning the spirits that move us.
- *Beginning anew*: suggests willingness to be decisive and to make proposals that help transform, restructure, innovate and rethink our concrete actions. Such proposals demand both personal and communal conversion and transformation of environment and structures.
- *Celebrating*: evokes an authentically celebrative attitude which is needed throughout the Congress. This demands an ability to create symbols, to contemplate, to be joyful, to ask pardon, to intercede, to give thanks, and to praise.

c) *The Icon: the Samaritan Woman and the Good Samaritan*

9. The Congress has as its theme “With a Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity,” and finds its inspiration for discernment and proposals in the double Gospel icon of the Samaritan Woman and the Good Samaritan. Both symbols, which have not traditionally been applied to consecrated life, can offer inspiration in this moment of need.



10. The Samaritan woman met Jesus at the well. She felt an attraction for his person, his mystery, and his message in her heart. She abandoned her water jug, that is, her former life, for him and became a witness to and sower of Good News (Jn 4:5-42). One day a Samaritan man met another human being, half dead, a victim of robbery and violence. He felt his heart moved to compassion. So, he changed his journey because of this person; he became his “neighbour” and took care of him with great generosity (Lk 10: 29-37). The Samaritan Woman and the Samaritan Man are symbols of the pathway along which the Spirit is leading consecrated life today and symbols of the love and compassion that the Spirit is arousing in our hearts. This double icon has shown itself to be a powerful force of inspiration throughout the history of spirituality. Today it also pours out its transforming energies on consecrated life. The Samaritan Woman and the Samaritan Man are sinners, yet grace and openness to goodness are not lacking in them. We consecrated women and men are very much like them and we feel challenged by her thirst and desire for living water and his compassion for the wounded on life’s byways.

11. We are experiencing a crucial period in our history. We are a world, a Church and consecrated life that experience the exuberance of life, as well as terrible signs of death. The Spirit leads us towards sources of life and simultaneously, towards those brothers and sisters of ours who lie prostrate and dying on life’s paths.

d) *Perspective: Discernment for Refounding*

12. The focus of this document:

We understand consecrated life to be a gift of the Spirit given to the Church for the world. The Church is mother and teacher. It is a field of action and mission for consecrated persons (EN 8, 24). In the People of God consecrated life is at the service of the Reign of God which is breaking forth in our world. We have to be attentive so that the world and the new culture, which is coming to birth, will have a human face and that the Church will be a “sacrament of humanization.” For this to become a reality consecrated life needs a radical revitalization that will give it

a new face. In this document everything is directed towards beginning a discernment of this new process, which has already been initiated by some religious men and women, some communities, and some congregations. This discernment will continue in the days of preparation

for the Congress and will be deepened during the Congress, and ultimately it will be shared with the whole of consecrated life. We intend to include the contributions of the theology of consecrated life, ecclesiology, and anthropology, but we will not develop these lines of thought.

## PART ONE

### THE REALITY THAT CHALLENGES US

*Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well (Jn 4:6)*

*And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan... was moved with compassion when he saw him... (Lk 10:31-33)*

14. As Jesus taught us we discover the will of God, the innovative action of the Spirit, the direction in which we should move, the presence of God and God's designs for us in the signs of the times. The comments from those who answered the questionnaire for the Congress have helped us to glean insights and to suggest a profile of consecrated life in these times.

15. When we look at our reality at this moment of history, in this particular world, in this Church, all of which form our experience, we ask ourselves various questions:

- *What is the Holy Spirit raising up in consecrated life today?*
- *How do we identify it, describe it, and present it?*
- *How are we initiated into it and how do we form ourselves for it?*
- *How do we describe the leadership that it needs?*
- *How do we discover the obstacles to its existence?*
- *To what new "wells," and new paths is this emerging consecrated life drawing us?*
- *What name could we give to this*

*process of newness in which we are involved?*

16. The following is a presentation of the challenges and the opportunities for grace that we have recognized as well as the obstacles that make our dreams impossible or difficult, and more concretely, our passion for Christ and for humanity. Important criteria for us are the *four great fidelities* that are mentioned in the document *Religious and Human Promotion*: "Fidelity to [humanity] and our times, fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, fidelity to the Church and her mission in the world, fidelity to religious life and the particular charism of each Institute" (RPH, 1980, nos. 13-31). We are also faithful to our current reality as well as to the great spiritual and ecclesial realities. The two perspectives are intertwined and mutually nourishing. We will consider each reality or situation in relation to consecrated life to see the influences and the challenges that are there. Our objective is none other than to be "ready to respond with the wisdom of the Gospel to the questions posed today by the anxieties and the urgent needs of the human heart" (VC 81).



## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

17. Consecrated life, being more global than ever, feels challenged by various new phenomena. Included among them are: 1) globalization with its ambiguities and mythology; 2) human mobility with its migratory phenomena and accelerated processes; 3) the unjust and destabilizing neo-liberal economic system; 4) a culture of death and the struggle to promote life in the face of challenges from biotechnology and eugenics; 5) pluralism and growing differentiation; 6) post-modern attitudes and mentality; 7) the thirst for love and the distortions of love; and 8) hunger for the sacred and secularistic materialism.

18. Such challenges situate us in a field of tensions and opposing forces that we can neither forget nor minimize. This makes it all the more necessary to discover where the Spirit is leading us in this “*novo millenio ineunte*”: What opportunities is the Spirit offering us for growth, innovation, and refoundation? What practical decisions inspire us to grow and renew? Toward what formation processes are we heading? What are the difficulties or stumbling blocks awaiting us?

### I. Globalization with its Ambiguities

19. We are dwellers in a global and planetary world. Information, thanks to new technologies, easily circles the entire planet and creates economic, political, and strategic dynamics, even unthought of and unsuspected ones. We feel closer to one another, and we can better understand our differences. Nevertheless, since these dynamics are at the service of those powers without official status but with immense influence, of particular interests, and of neo-liberal ideologies, they have very negative and discriminatory consequences. They generate poverty, humiliate the dignity of peoples with few resources, impose only one neo-liberal economic model, and marginalize cultures, peoples, and groups that do not serve their interests.

20. Consecrated life is also involved in the process of globalalization. Our charisms are root-

ed in new religious and cultural places and contexts. These differences convert our institutes into transnational communities that enjoy the same global identity. Nevertheless, there is the danger that the predominant culture in the institute will impose itself on the others and thus impede the inculturation process and the expression of the charism in new contexts (VC 73 and 79). This universalising model can have negative consequences similar to those of the neo-liberal project, going against the poor and the excluded.

21. The challenge of globalization can become an opportunity to recognize the unity in the diversity of this world so loved by God. A prophetic commitment to justice and peace and care for creation is a dimension of the Christian mission, in which the Church and consecrated life oppose the neo-liberal model of globalization and defend a model of global consciousness without excluding or impoverishing anyone. [“global consciousness” translates the Spanish “*mundialización*” - trans.] This form of global sensitivity opens us to real possibilities for an inculturation and contextualization of our charisms and also for closer collaboration with other congregations and with other forms of Christian and human living.

### II. Human Mobility and its Migratory Phenomena

22. Diverse political and social conflicts such as poverty, wars, political instability, and religious intolerance are among the causes of the various waves of migration that are changing the complexion of some nations. Large sectors of humanity feel displaced, uprooted, and dispersed throughout the world. The constant struggle for survival in such circumstances hinders the transmission of traditions, balanced education, and healthy, dignified development. The migration of peoples challenges us in that in welcoming others, we put our own Christian and religious identity at stake. From this arise admirable atti-

tudes of hospitality and receptiveness, but also xenophobic, ethnocentric and racist attitudes that we cannot tolerate.

23. In consecrated life we also experience the mobility characteristic of the times. We are called to be Exodus communities and persons who wish to have an attitude of dialogue with life and culture, an openness of mind and a capacity for transformation. In an unjust and divided world we need to be signs and witnesses of dialogue and trust, of communion and communal love (VD 51).

24. Today consecrated life has an opportunity to meet people in their mobility. It has an opportunity to share with many men and women the sense of uprootedness from one's own cultural identity as well as the process of adapting and of creating new syntheses. Consecrated persons have to be "Samaritans" in knowing how to welcome, accompany, and care for these wounded and marginalized persons. Their mission takes on essential overtones of hospitality, compassion, and inter-religious and intercultural dialogue (VC 79). All this presupposes that consecrated life undergo a profound restructuring of life style, mentality, and programs.

### III. The Unjust Economic System and New Forms of Solidarity

25. Another great challenge is the exclusion to which great sections of humanity are subjected in the name of the current globalization process. An economy of exploitation generates wants and new types of poverty (cf. NMI 50) that lead in the end to an ongoing depreciation of life. The liberalization of the world economy has not managed to avoid the evil effects which crush the weak and less developed peoples and countries.

26. As consecrated men and women, we can picture ourselves involved in this economy which excludes many. This challenge really tests the truth of our solidarity with the poor, the excluded, and those threatened in their right to life, and also tests our commitment to their liberation. We recognize that this solidarity is an essential part of our faith in Jesus, of the prophetic dimen-



sion of our consecrated life, and of our following of Jesus. The evangelical counsel of poverty should become more and more a personal and communal practice of solidarity with the poor, of detachment, of giving freely, of trust in Providence, and of simple witness. (VC 82)

27. Consciousness of unjust economic systems also offers us the opportunity of confronting our life style with the Gospel and with the urgent needs of the poor. It challenges us to establish an economy of solidarity that is critical of the present economic system. It calls us to put our resources and institutions at the service of the poor and of creation by participating actively in the defense and *promotion of life, justice, and peace* through collaboration with other religious and civic organizations.

### IV. Life Threatened and Defended

28. Life is abundant and fruitful in nature and in humanity. An appreciation, defense and passion for life is shown today in many ways. There are persons and organizations who work on behalf of the poor, human rights and peace, and, at the same time, the great steps forward in the sciences, bio-technology, and modern medicine constitute a sign of both hope and fear for humanity. This is particularly true for consecrated men and women who are committed to promoting and

protecting human life.

29. There are numerous indicators of violence and death in our world. Life on our planet is threatened, e.g., contamination and lack of water, deforestation, pollution, toxic wastes. Human life is devalued from conception to death, e.g., abortion, violence against women and children, sexual violence, totalitarianism, terrorism, wars, the death penalty, euthanasia. The sources of life and fertility are being manipulated often without scruple and without ethical criteria. At times we get the impression of scientific showmanship. Religious fundamentalism of many kinds provokes a violence that could be called “sacred” and from which we ourselves are not exempt.

30. The challenges are numerous, above all for consecrated men and women who serve in the field of health:

- *ethical challenges: abortion, euthanasia for the terminally ill, the use of therapeutic cloning and embryos for the healing of some degenerative diseases;*
- *the challenge of the great endemic and epidemic diseases, such as HIV, malaria, ebola, SARS;*
- *challenges in the field of justice: e.g., the moral acceptability of the pharmaceutical industry warehousing medicines while the poor die for lack of medication. Consecrated men and women could be these poor sick people as well as the defenders of their human rights.*

31. This dramatic situation opens up new opportunities for us. We can no longer live without being deeply affected by these situations that impact Mother Earth and our human community. We should be attentive so as not to be coreponsible for a “culture of death.” Our apostolic plans have no sense if they do not stimulate us to serve with greater devotion those whose lives are diminished or lead us to establish a true “culture of life.”

## **V. Pluralism and Increasing Differentiation**

32. We live in a pluralistic world, and we are more sensitive than ever to differences due to ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and generations. The acceptance of pluralism makes our

way of thinking and acting difficult. Some cultures are excluded. Respect for differences and pluralism often conflicts with networks of particular interests. Many times majorities prevail over minorities; force over reason; economy over solidarity; law over freedom; gender exclusion over gender inclusion; dictatorship over democracy. The tendency towards a single way of thinking and the leveling of everything cause great tension and distress.

33. Consecrated life embraces pluralism and diversity now more than in other times. Consecrated life itself is called to be diverse in its members and in the charisms that the Spirit gives it. This is why men and women in consecrated life feel uncomfortable in uniform ecclesiastical or social systems and in monocultures that are neither open nor participative. The challenge of dialogue, on all levels, attempts to shape a new style of consecrated life. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that religious life has also many times imposed cultural forms, ways of acting, ethnic fanaticism, and caste differences. Mature religious obedience, an exercise in attentive listening to God’s desires and those of others, in free submission, and in an integrated personal and community commitment, helps us to respond adequately to this challenge.

34. This task changes into an opportunity when we are capable of entering into communion with those who are different from us. Individual charisms are recognized, freed, and put at the service of others. Consecrated life in which differences of gender, age, culture, rites, and sensitivities are respected and promoted, acquires a notable quality of being a sign in our world. In this way, consecrated life gains a better understanding of pluralism in our society and is better equipped to defend it and to illuminate it with the wisdom of the Gospel.

## **VI. Postmodern Mentality and Attitudes**

35. The so-called “postmodern mentality” is a globalized phenomenon that affects above all, the younger generations. They are more sensitive to the reality that surrounds us, more receptive to pluralism and complexity, and, as such, are more

vulnerable. This, in turn, fosters feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and instability, and from this comes a narcissistic tendency to look for pleasure in the present without any responsibility for or hope in the future. It should not be surprising that fundamentalist, reactionary movements which seek to establish security by restoring the past, arise in reaction to this.

36. In consecrated life we also see that the complexity of our world and a postmodern mentality produce, especially in the younger generations, a type of personality that is more complex and less defined. This has particular effects on the life and mission of consecrated persons. It shows up in attitudes more tolerant of diversity and more centered on the subjective, less interested in accepting long-term and definitive life commitments. Everything becomes relative in relation to subjective feelings and needs for temporary commitment. From this we see the necessity for finding ways to live the Gospel authentically and creatively in this new postmodern culture.

37. This postmodern attitude gives us an opportunity to recognize our own limits and to avoid the triumphalism of the past. It should also make us more vulnerable and compassionate, both towards our own communities and towards all people. We see an opportunity in this to regain our compassion for the suffering of our world. The sense of temporariness and the cultural difficulties with permanence/stability could lead us to study the possibilities of proposing forms of consecrated life "ad tempus" (VC 56 and Propositio 33) which would avoid giving the sense that someone who has joined consecrated life for a time, has deserted or abandoned it.

## **VII. The Thirst for Love and the Distortion of Love**

38. We perceive that in our world there is a deep thirst for love and intimacy that is expressed in so many different forms that sometimes we feel disturbed. There is a desire for the kind of marriage and family that becomes a home and communion, security in the midst of a hostile, strange, rapidly changing, and violent world. We are very aware of how difficult working at a love

relationship can be, how it can be continuously interrupted, and can even fail and end in self-centeredness. There are various reasons for difficulties in this area: a cultural dominance of one gender over the other (machismo or sexism), patterns of employment, that are imposed because of outside forces which do not favor the stability that the family and couple require, a desire for autonomy and self-realization, etc. The number of divorces is high, and at the same time life expectancy is longer. More possibilities for relations between persons of the same or of the opposite sex have appeared. That the institutions of marriage and the family, such as we have inherited them, are in crisis is obvious. All of this generates a "distortion of love" difficult to manage.

39. The Church laments the fact that her message and doctrine - laid out in more integrated and educational schemas - are not sufficiently embraced and carried out, not only by society but also by her own faithful. Consecrated life has also been affected by this situation both in the living out of celibacy or consecrated chastity and in community and interpersonal relationships. The constant flow of those who leave this form of life, the sexual scandals, and the affective immaturity of members indicate that this situation is unsatisfactory to more than a few, who also do not find ways of getting beyond the obstacles and blocks. The celibacy that we profess in consecrated life demands a mature, generous, fruitful, and healthy way of living our affectivity and our sexuality. This witness becomes a prophetic gesture in a society like ours so greatly marked by eroticism (VC 88).

40. A theological and anthropological reflection of this sort cannot be limited to this topic and to problems related to celibacy or community life. It is, however, true that in speaking of celibacy and community life we need to keep in mind the contributions of the new anthropology. Only in this way can we respond to new situations and have a better orientation for formation in love and celibacy, emphasizing the relational and integrating dimension of spirit and body. This anthropology should influence the other areas of

consecrated life as well. Up to now we have not always been on target in formulating its implications for formation and vocation ministry, for multiple interpersonal relationships, for forms of government and organization, and for language. If we do not pay attention to the human substratum that sustains consecrated life, we could easily be building on sand.

### **VIII. Thirst for the Sacred and Secularistic Materialism**

41. This theme does not come at the end because it is less important, but because it is the key which gives meaning to everything that has been said. An authentic renewal of consecrated life and a revitalization of its mission arise out of a healthy and lively spirituality. We see in our world a thirst for the sacred and a longing for spirituality, for meaning, and for transcendence. On the other hand, too much confidence in ourselves, in power, in technology, and in wealth moves us far away from the ultimate Reality. In our world, new idols are being adored that prevent the adoration of the one and true God. A secularized vision of reality is globalized, especially in rich countries, and we find ourselves immersed in a world without transcendence, syncretistic, agnostic, and functional; in other words, in a world without a soul.

42. Both in the Church and in consecrated life, the secular environment also favors a tendency toward idolatry that is expressed in a cult of the media, of the powerful, of institutions, customs, ritualism, and laws. This makes conversion to the one and only Absolute and Necessary difficult. It also makes passion for God and for the Reign of God difficult. The challenge of a deep experience of God and of a passion, which is mission-oriented, innovative, and prophetic, is seen today as conversion to the living God. Hunger for God nourishes our Exodus, and mission gives meaning to our Christian and consecrated vocation. Moreover, we should see that the new experiences and forms of spirituality are not only fruits of human searching, but also true calls and challenges of the Spirit for a society and humanity that have not found the paths of transcendence

but still eagerly search for the mysterious face of God (VC 84).

43. The thirst for God and a healthy spirituality for our times, together with an idolatrous and secular tendency, offer us the opportunity to purify our vision of what is religious and to find new modes of expression, thus living out our passion for the God of the Covenant. Consecrated life will recover its identity if it appears and acts as a witness to God, as an announcer of God's reign and if it makes use of serious spiritual means to listen intelligently and empathetically to the sentiments of the human heart. It will thus offer services of spiritual paternity and maternity to our contemporaries who need them. Witness to the true God also demands that consecrated persons be prepared to risk, in the extreme case, their own lives, even unto martyrdom (VC 86). This situation offers us new opportunities for evangelical creativity in announcing the Risen Jesus.

44. A spirituality that is able to face as an equal challenges and expectations of the men and women of our times must be nourished with daily, prayerful listening to the Word. We need to strengthen ourselves to meet the demands of the Paschal Mysteries that we celebrate daily, to insert ourselves in the not always easy or defined pathway of God's people in this world and to enter into a welcoming dialogue that is capable of discerning the utopias and wounds of our present humanity. Only by using this experience of life in the Spirit as a point of departure can we encourage and animate a new epoch in the history of the coming of the reign of God and in the history of consecrated life. According to different cultural and religious contexts, this spirituality can place more emphasis on elements of interiority or historic commitment, but it can never falter in its continuous search for a dynamic balance between these two perspectives. By encountering God, we encounter a great love for the human being especially the "little ones" and the frailest; by encountering the poor and the wounded we are moved in our deepest being and our eyes see in them an image of God, even if disfigured and scorned.

## OBSTACLES

45. Sometimes it is difficult or impossible to walk the paths along which the Spirit directs us. Consecrated life appears to be held back with locked brakes and blocked by various obstacles. We are the cause of some of them, while others are caused by the Church and by the world in which we live.

### I Obstacles Caused by Ourselves

#### *a) Personal and community limitations*

46. Our institutes seem blocked, in the first place, by the limitations of the persons who are members. Among these limitations are the continuing aging of their members and of the institutes themselves in some countries; the development of new vocations who are sometimes affected by family or social traumas or are inadequately chosen or poorly accompanied in the formation process; the excess of work burdening some; superficiality in discernment or the lack of serious initial and ongoing formation. These limitations also put a limit on the capacity of the institutes to respond to the challenges of our times and places. In turn this reduces and, in some cases swallows up, our passion for Christ and for humanity. For these reasons, the programmatic vision expressed in our documents often exceeds our real possibilities and gets stuck in the first stages of developing an unreal utopia. This generates anxiety and frustration. Solemn theoretical proclamations and language distant from everyday life speak more of human cunning than of evangelical wisdom.

#### *b) Infidelity and a lack of vocational response*

47. Another obstacle comes from our infidelity or lack of response to our vocational gift. A middle class mentality or a strong sense of being well established, generated by an excessive interest in comfort and goods, along with a lack of evangelical simplicity, born of excessive attachment to material goods, suffocates openness and a spirit of mission. It blurs a contemplative vision and numbs us in the presence of the poor and marginalized, thus hindering an authentic life of communion.

48. Direct or indirect involvement in sexual and economic scandals and in the abuse of power takes away our credibility, our moral and evangelical authority, and paralyzes the implementation of our projects. To be in touch with reality, we cannot ignore these serious facts. It is difficult to weigh out the consequences, but there is no doubt that all of this puts into question the evangelical radicality of this kind of life which should shine with a real brilliance.

#### *c) Fears and shutting out*

49. The action of the Spirit is blocked within us when we let ourselves be motivated by a fear of taking any risks and refrain from making suitable decisions that might displease a dominant group or authority. Fear paralyzes. It reduces our capacity to risk and moves us to seek secure positions. We become traditionalists, conservatives, persons closed to renewal and innovation.

50. When superiors allow themselves to be influenced by fear, weak leadership develops that tries to please everyone and everything and as a result, becomes very indecisive or too subservient to higher authorities. In a word, such superiors are more willing to please than to act. It is difficult to exercise authority and obedience in an evangelical way, in this situation. Today we lack men and women with sufficient moral authority to lead communities in creative fidelity to the charism.

51. Groups that try to hinder conciliar renewal and impose their laws on certain aspects of life and in certain circumstances change the collective charism into something routine and decadent. In these cases creative persons are looked upon with jealousy and are controlled; the most they are permitted to do is to make some superficial changes that do not threaten the status quo. In this way the “new wine” is poured into “old wineskins” (Mt 9:17).

52. Fear leads us to search for securities that in turn, lead us to close ourselves up within our own little world, be it religious, ecclesiastical, provincial or national. We become inordinately

attached to our own language and culture and to isolation in our charism or religious tradition. We become blind to the signs of the Spirit and we kill all initiative and creativity for responding to the great urgencies of our times. There is a pressing need for a new inspiration from Vatican Council II that will make us audacious and striking in our faithful living of the Gospel.

## **II. From the Church and Society**

53. The Church is the Body of Christ in continual growth (MR 11). Consecrated life finds living space, expansion, and growth within her. However, it feels blocked wherever a closed ecclesiastical system dominates, be it on the universal level or in particular local Churches, where the system distrusts and is suspicious of the evangelical freedom that so often moves consecrated life. In such circumstances, consecrated life feels relegated to a position of inferiority and not appreciated in relation to other groups that are more docile. In some places its initiatives and labours are dulled and suffer discrimination. If it then opts for conformity with the situation, it loses touch with its most prophetic source. If it opts for the exercise of its prophetic vocation, it is excluded. The prophetic dimension, so essential to consecrated life, needs to be nurtured and promoted (VC 84-85).

54. The societies in which we live influence us very powerfully, in such a way that their obstacles are our obstacles, in much the same way that their virtues are our virtues. We have only to mention the obstacles that proceed from dictatorial regimes, societies that are very “closed in on themselves” without any openness to global realities, and societies immersed in materialism and secularism. There are many groups, currents, and cultural tendencies that block us: the lack of credibility on the part of the principal organizations (political parties, labour unions, social projects, religious organizations), the collapse of the great Utopias that make the struggle for a

better future that much more difficult, and terror and violence. All of these make us more insecure and fearful everyday and everywhere.

## **III. Hope not Crushed by Obstacles**

55. This reality that challenges us does not crush our hope. Our time is the time of our God of the Covenant, of our God “always greater,” of our God whose gifts surpass our desires.

56. We, as consecrated persons, are living through crucial moments for humanity and for the Church. We have to make decisions of great importance for the immediate future. We are being presented with decisive options: we can gladden life or make it difficult; grow in communion or create greater distances between us; be conquered by difficulties or face them. We do not have time to spare. New realities demand new responses. God is speaking to us through these new situations and challenges. These responses must be rooted in real life, but they also have to come to birth and be nourished with the wisdom of God and with the Word through whom God comes to us and enlightens us, provokes us, draws us out, purifies us, guides us, and inspires us anew. This is the hour to listen to God’s voice. The present period in the history of consecrated life is not its best hour, but it is not its worst hour either. It is our hour, the one that we are given to form and prosper with a faith that acts through charity and makes hope possible.

57. We cannot live in an ideal kind of consecrated life which is far removed from reality. Neither can we forget about this in order to talk about a future outside of the real world, nor can we shape a future out of a paradigm that is dying. It would be good to regain the ability for a real revitalization making use of the models proposed, while accepting the necessity of trying fragile solutions without deciding everything beforehand.

## PART TWO

### ENLIGHTENMENT: THE SYMBOL

*And when he comes, he will tell us everything. (Jn 4:25)*

*What is written?... What do you read there? (Lk 10:26)*

58. Facing the realities that challenge us and the obstacles that paralyze us, we turn to the Word of God for light and strength. This is what our Founders and Foundresses did. "From familiarity with God's word they draw the light needed for that individual and communal discernment which helps them to see the ways of the Lord in the signs of the times" (VC 94). The Word of God invites us to discern the will of God, what pleases God, the more perfect (Rm 12:2), to discern God's ways through the signs of the times and to act with fidelity and wisdom.

59. We want to be enlightened in our discernment, as we have said, by two biblical symbols: the narrative about the meeting of the Samaritan woman with Jesus at Jacob's well (Jn 4:1-42) and

the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29-37). Consecrated women in their contribution to the Synod of 1994 have already used the first symbol. Here we use it to affirm the passionate, spiritual searching for living water, "contemplative passion" that all of us - consecrated men and women - carry in our hearts and which only Jesus can satisfy. The second symbol is proposed as an example of active and diligent compassion towards every person, wounded in body and spirit. Both symbols can inspire our discernment and offer us new perspectives and wise direction as we begin this new century. New and unthought of horizons are opened to us and we can find direction in this new combination of elements.

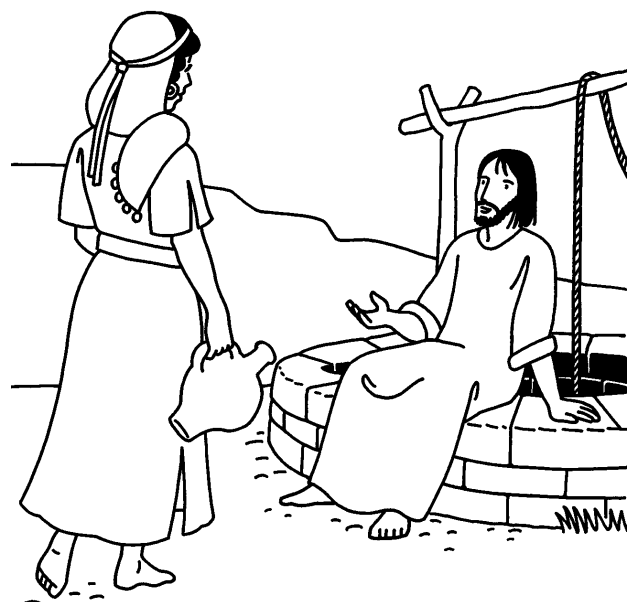
### SAMARITAN WOMAN, SAMARITAN MAN

60. Against all expectations - common ones of those times - that a Samaritan would behave in a way conforming to the will of God, the two protagonists are involved in a process of transformation that is expressed in gestures and particular reactions that can inspire our lives. Consecrated life, both feminine and masculine, sees reflected in both symbols its spiritual adventure of passion for Christ and passion for human beings.

#### I. The Symbol of the Samaritan Woman: Thirst and Liberating Dialogue

61. The story of the dialogue with the Samaritan Woman in John appears in the context of the first reactions to Jesus: the Jew, Nicodemus who wanted to know clearly but resisted partly because of his scepticism (Jn 3:1-21); the Samaritan Woman who is fascinated and thus led to the new (Jn 4:1-42); and the pagan official who is converted with his whole family (Jn 4:46-52).

Traditionally, the entire fourth chapter of John is considered as a baptismal catechesis. In her life journey, the Samaritan woman meets Jesus (Jn 4:1-42). Jesus, tired from his journey, is sitting by Jacob's well. Moved by God the Father's suppli-



ant love and challenging the prejudices and taboos of his time (Jn 4:27), he begins a dialogue with the woman asking her for a drink. Jesus is not disturbed by her initial resistance: the dialogue develops through the woman's seven answers and Jesus' seven statements. The conversation touches the hearts of both of them. Jesus breathes deeply and asks to be believed. He speaks of the real worship in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23-24). He entrusts her with his deepest secret, telling her that he is the "Messiah who is to come" (Jn 4:26). The woman feels the strength of his words and the deep attraction of his person. Slowly she discovers the mystery of this man who offers her living water and the possibility of a new relationship with God that goes beyond the institutionalised worship practiced on the mountain or in the Temple.

62. This woman bears in her heart a history of wounded relationships. Perhaps so as not to be noticed, she goes to the well at an off-hour. No doubt she knows some elements of religious practice, but has a need for something new and more profound. When she finds it, she changes into a new person. The emptiness of her life is well symbolized in the water jug. Jesus perceives the interior malaise that had caused her past adventures. He reveals, with a certain rhythm, the worries that he discovers in the woman. She is transformed, passing from irony to a seduction that disarms her, from emptiness to a plenitude that enthuses her. She begins to reflect and to trust. The mysterious master does not condemn her but speaks new words to her touching her heart, which is thirsting for depth in relationships. The meeting with Jesus transforms her into a messenger: she runs to the city and challenges her neighbours with the announcement of a "Messiah" who knows without condemning and directs thirst to the waters that spring forth to life eternal (Jn 4:39). The water jug, a symbol of human thirst and affections that have never been satisfied, now becomes useless. She lets it go (Jn 4:28). Meanwhile, Jesus announces to his disciples that the harvest is ripe and it is time to reap (Jn 4:35-38). The woman sows faith in Jesus among those in the town and then brings the townsfolk to Jesus (Jn 4:39).

63. We can find in this biblical account a symbol of our vocation as an experience of encounter with Jesus and commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel. In the meeting place - totally void of all sacred signs - the dialogue opens the heart to the truth, reveals, and heals. God shows himself fragile and thirsty in Jesus. God's thirst meets the woman's thirst, our thirst. He who asks for a drink is willing to offer a new drink, an eternal water that transforms life. The relationship becomes a game and a glance, confidence and new birth. Jesus does not distrust a bothered humanity. His serenity and interior freedom allow humanity, represented in the woman, to be the protagonist, to dance at its own rhythm of discontent until it finds the living water that springs forth to life eternal. Jesus' thirst and the thirst of the woman are the main elements of this liberating dialogue that heals the interior wounds, until now incurable, and made more intolerable by racial and religious prejudice. The "indigent" love of God, shown through Jesus, invites us - a restless humanity - to drink and offers us freely the Water of Life.

64. In the woman we see a reflection of the many times that we have been wounded in our mutual relationships, thirsting for truth and authenticity. We also discover that we are incapable of understanding our affections behind which our wounded hearts hide. Meditating on this text gives the light of the Word to our life. Simple and ordinary circumstances of life are pleasing to Jesus; they are transformed into special moments of grace and revelation. The capacity to gather people that this woman has, despite her shady past, is surprising; but at the same time it teaches us to have confidence in little things and in humble resources. The prejudices with which the disciples live in this scene (Jn 4:26-27) reveal a macho mentality that has lasted into our times. But it is the serenity in Jesus, born of a clear consciousness of his mission, which allows him to patiently wait for the right question and the moment of total confidence. The disciples go into the town to buy something to eat; the woman goes back to town alone, but is responsible for many other Samaritans beginning their journey in faith toward "the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:30-42).

## II. The Symbol of the Good Samaritan

65. On the road of life a Samaritan - as the parable tells us - met another person that robbers had left half dead; deeply moved by this sight, he took care of him (Lk 10:25-37). Insidiously challenged by the teacher of the Law about what one should do to enter into eternal life and who is one's neighbour, Jesus, first of all, refers him to the Law - the principle commandment - and then, to clarify the concept of neighbour, Jesus gives an example in the form of a story through which he changes the perspective. The most important thing is not so much knowing who my neighbour is so as to love him, but rather having in one's heart the disposition to be moved in compassion and approach whomever is in need. At this point the change occurs from his understanding of neighbour as the object of attention, including some and excluding others, to an understanding of neighbour as the subject, who, in love, is neighbour to all, because only an active compassion makes us neighbours.

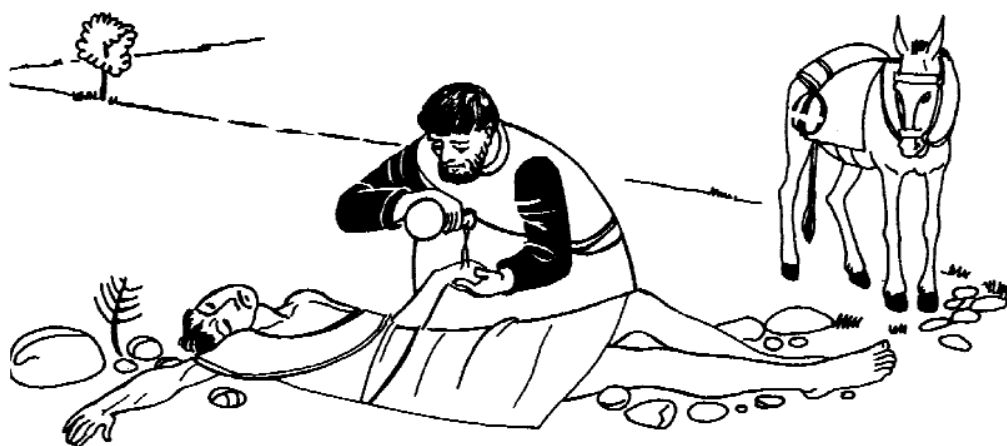
66. We can distinguish between the Samaritan of the tragic hour - the one who helps the victim of the thieves, in the place where he is, immediately and effectively to prevent his death - and the Samaritan of the following day - who organizes the recovery according to the demands of the times and the economy, asking others to collaborate.

67. In this text the pastoral and theological tradition has found a reflection of humanity, hurt, abandoned, and on its own, and of God's compassion that, through his Son, bends down to heal it. This interpretation is based on the verb

“to feel compassion” kai esplanchnisthè - that is used here as well as in the narrative of the widow of Naim (Lk 7:13) and is also the motivation that moves the father of the Prodigal Son to run towards him (Lk 15:20). This lovely and suggestive interpretation is still valid and teaches us to have the same feelings as Christ, to kneel as he did before a wounded and violated humanity, and to help with all one's resources the wounded and abandoned who lie half dead on the peripheries of our society.

68. In this parable we see how Jesus, in his evaluation, has pushed to the side, on the one hand, those who are signs of religious power when they are not moved by compassion, while on the other hand, he gives centre stage to a man who is moved to make poor and simple gestures of healing with oil, wine, bandages, his own beast of burden, and the inn. The immediate help is offered as “first aid,” but the Samaritan also asks the innkeeper to “care” for the man. This is why he cares for him, helps, respects, entrusts him to another's care, and prolongs his stay. For the Samaritan, the poor victim was constantly present in his mind, and his concern was such that he returned to check on the treatment that was being given and to pay the costs. He does not shift his worries on to other shoulders, but rather they become a stimulus for active solidarity. The final invitation of Jesus “to do the same” (Lk 10:37) is directed toward practice and not toward theoretical principles.

69. The Samaritan's road is today an immense space where men and women, children and old people, are downtrodden; they bear in their



“half-dead” bodies the wounds that all types of violence inflict on their bodies and in their souls. Innumerable are the faces disfigured by violence and injustice: the faces of emigrants and refugees in search of a new homeland, the faces of exploited women and children, the elderly and the sick abandoned to their own fate, faces humiliated by racial and religious prejudices, the faces of children traumatized in body and spirit, faces disfigured by hunger and torture. These are the beaten and broken of the earth who lie on the margins of society throughout history and beg for a creative compassion that causes traditional charitable institutions to change in order to respond to the new urgencies and give new testimony to their neighbour. To be a neighbour means to see situations from the perspective of the poor who are at the bottom, the last (éschaton) of society and the deciding criterion in the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-45), and from the perspective of these urgencies and of the process of healing and liberation. The main challenge today consists in changing priorities in order to promote dynamics of neighbourly compassion.

70. The most important challenge is that of moving into action, giving priority to the needy, to persons and not business, to the healing processes and not to the sacred norms that strip us of compassion - which is what happened to the priest and the Levite. The people of the

“Institution” did not know how to free up and use their imaginations in order to be charitable. They continued on the road keeping themselves pure in the legal and cultural sense. However, the man who exercised his religiosity and worship in an unacceptable form, even to the point of being scorned by the official religious leaders, showed himself to be the only one really capable of practicing charity. Freed of external religious schemas, he had courage, “guts,” and a heart of mercy. When the deepest parts of our being, the “guts,” are moved, even poor resources such as oil, wine, and bandages become signs of great, deep values. But we must get off our own beast of burden that makes of us privileged persons and that separates us from so many travellers who walk along the way without dignity, home, or goals. We have to pour out over their wounds the oil of our contemplation, so that it be not merely a lonely ego trip. Along with the oil we pour out the wine of our tenderness and gratitude to give them hope and the desire for living.

71. The community of Samaritans forms around Jesus. It is the community of those who are with him and share his compassion for humanity. They are sent, as he was, to preach. They receive as well the power to expel demons (Mk 3:15) and cure the sick, anointing them with oil (Mk 6:13). This is how the true community of Jesus is formed in a world of violence and injustice.

## CONSECRATED LIFE AS SAMARITAN

### I. Keys to a Rereading

72. These symbols - considered together - show us how the consecrated life arises from a vocational experience that occurs in an encounter and dialogue of life with Jesus and with the most needy people who challenge us. The Samaritan woman and man push us to bring to light our wounded relationships of consecrated life so as to embrace them compassionately, cure them gratuitously and diligently, pouring out over them the oil of contemplation and the wine of tenderness and gratitude. Both images allow us to sit at so many “wells” where disturbed hearts lacking new liberating hope go to slake their

thirst or to walk the roads where we find the indigent who need our help; to dialogue calmly and without prejudice, without calculating time or prestige; to share our passion for the water that truly satisfies, revitalizes and transforms; to get off our “high horses” - privileges, rigid structures, sacred prejudices - to bind ourselves to the fate of the crucified of the earth, and to struggle against all violence and injustice, beginning in this way a new phase of healing and solidarity.

### II. The “New Model”

73. A consecrated life with new characteristics is

being birthed under the impulse of the Spirit that is guiding us along the path to complete truth (Jn 16:13). We feel ever more frequently the need for an intense contemplative experience, lived in the midst of the anguish and the hopes of the people, especially the most fragile and insignificant. A new paradigm for consecrated life is being put together - born of compassion for the scarred and downtrodden of the earth - around new priorities, new models of organization and open and flexible collaboration with men and women of good will. The elements that have characterized this Christian vocation in history and express its great and rich tradition are gathered up in a new synthesis. This permits consecrated life to recapture the Gospel as its first norm, the great commandment of the covenant as its nuclear element, and community as both proposal and prophecy within a divided and unjust society, living passionately for humanity with a great capacity for imagination

and creativity. The experience of insertion among the poor and excluded has reconfigured consecrated life as Samaritan life that announces the Gospel with new expressions. "How many consecrated men and women have bent down, and continue to bend down, as Good Samaritans, over the countless wounds of the brothers and sisters whom they meet on their way!" (VC 108)

74. A new image of the paschal Church, the servant, enriched by the testimony of martyrs, is thus emerging in the midst of much fragility. There are widely spread examples and experiences of communities formed in solidarity, prayer and boldness, constant in doing good and vigilant in compassion, daring in initiatives and joyful in hope. "Does not [this world of ours] also need men and women who, by their lives and their work, are able to sow seeds of peace and fraternity?" (VC 108)

## PART THREE TOWARD ACTION

*Give me a drink! (Jn 4:7)*

*Do this and life is yours!... Go and do the same yourself! (Lk 10:28 & 37)*

75. The insistent words of Jesus to the teacher of the Law are today directed to us: "Do this and life is yours!" For consecrated life the two symbols are a stimulus and a program for living and commitment. Ours is the hermeneutic task of interpreting in every place and time the way to make these symbols a reality. In consecrated life we have presupposed many things just by the fact of knowing them and of talking about them. However, we should only presuppose what we live.

76. Above all, we recognize that we are not lacking in will. God is already acting in us and with us. There are indications of newness, precursors of the gift that we are being offered and which we should already recognize. But there are also areas or fields in which we have to demonstrate our willingness to collaborate with grace and to show the creative and imaginative power of our liberty and the "fantasy of charity" (NMI 50).

## INDICATIONS OF NEWNESS: WHERE IS THE SPIRIT LEADING US?

77. The Holy Spirit continues to act in the world, the Church, and in us. Signs of hope and life appear everywhere. Those who are sensitive to the Spirit and the Truth "know the gift of God" (Jn 4: 10) and also know what should be

done to live and give life. There are signs of all this in consecrated life that we should be able to read and interpret. Above all, we have to know how to enter into the processes so as to bring to fruition what is now beginning.

## I. The Power of the Fountain, Source of the Living Water

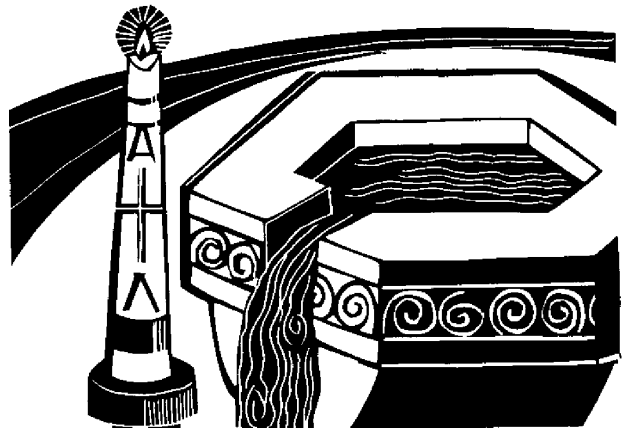
78. From Vatican Council II to date, consecrated life has made a great effort to return to its sources, to encounter God's gift. It has sought to re-encounter the Word through its founding inspiration and identity.

79. The Word of God has been placed in the center of life and affects all its aspects. We listen to it with the whole People of God in the context of our times. Consecrated life "has reencountered the Word" (VC 81 & 94). In the Word we find strength to live, orientation to walk, and stimulus for our projects. The basis of our incarnated and inculturated spirituality is the Word. From the Word, we integrate all the aspects of our life: prayer, community, and mission. This has been achieved in a special way, through the discovery and diffusion of the ancient tradition of the "*lectio divina*". Thus, the Word is made living wisdom that "challenges, orients, and moulds existence" (NMI 39). Nourished by the Word we are transformed into "servants of the Word in the task of evangelization" (NMI 40).

80. In some religious institutes there has been a return to the original founding inspiration according to the spirit of Vatican Council II (PC 2). Where this has happened the institute has been able:

- a) *to perceive the permanent freshness of its charism and its gathering, transforming and prophetic strength (VC 84-85); to return to the origins of an institute has made us "consider ourselves family";*
- b) *to understand that the charism inherited is a gift for the whole Church and, as such, should be shared with others (VC 54-56);*
- c) *to discover a new reality expressed in new language: "shared charism," "shared spirituality," "shared mission," "shared community" (RdC 30-31);*
- d) *to modify our understanding of the institute to consider ourselves as "family," to put life back into our sense of Church and shared consecrated life;*
- e) *to see our enthusiasm reborn and to recover the creative fantasy of the origins in new contexts, responding to new needs (VC 37);*
- f) *to redefine our identity not only from "essential ele-*

*ments" but also in relation to all the forms of Christian living, from humble service of all, and from an attitude of sharing (CjFL 55); and*  
g) *to respond to the request of the laity and ordained ministers to share our spiritual inspiration.*



## II The Meetings that Transform: We Have Gone to Drink from the Same Well

81. The Spirit of God continues to create the "New," continues to speak to us through the prophets, and calls us to loving fidelity and apostolic audacity (VC 82). Today in consecrated life there are traces of the Spirit's renewing presence. In consecrated life there are new "encounters" that transform and give new life but also leave new questions and challenges (VC 73). Creation is an encounter, as are incarnation and redemption. These encounters, if they are to be fruitful, need to take place in the "meeting tent" as was the case with Moses (Ex 33:7). In the process of refoundation already started, consecrated life has passed from isolation and distance to dialogue, sharing, communication, presence, and interaction. New ways of relating have multiplied.

82. Among the most significant and important encounters and among those with greater consequences for consecrated life, we need to note the following: encounters between men and women and between religious and "laity." Through these encounters we are slowly learning how to drink from the same well and to walk through the life

of the Church and of society with both feet, listening with our two ears and seeing with our two eyes. Encounters between different cultures and different generations are increasing. We are learning how to live with cultural diversity and with people of different ages and to see these differences as a great richness. Encounters between religious and the poor: the experience of insertion and solidarity and shared life with the poor have been very fruitful when they have occurred (VC 82). Encounters between believers and non-believers have taken place as well as encounters among members of different religions which also bring together different churches. We are trying to break many kinds of barriers and divisions and to build bridges and to create communion. We are also discovering the richness of the different forms of religious life in the different traditions, through dialogue with them and interchange. A great richness for religious is the encounter with Mother Earth. The ecological dimension can bring about important consequences for our mission and spirituality (VC 103; NMI 56). The encounter among different congregations that goes from simple collaboration to confederation, federation, or fusion (VC 52, 53) allows us to put in relief what is essential and common to consecrated life without losing the aspects specific to each group. This will contribute to finding the new paradigm that all of us in one way or another seek.

83. These encounters lived as events, as processes, as grace are revealing the lines of development of the indispensable dimensions of the new in consecrated life. They are already becoming a reality but need the creativity and insight of many in order to take shape in the present situation of Church and society. All these encounters are demanding, and with a certain frequency we initiate them but we do not follow through on them. Nevertheless, in these encounters and through them new forms of evangel-

ical life are emerging, which are simple, radical, ecumenical, inserted among the people, flexible in structure, welcoming, attentive to symbolic language, attentive to the present rhythms of life, and attentive to the demands of deep communion with God and with people. (VC 12, 62).

### III. The language of singing water: it flows and runs

84. These signs of vitality that the Spirit is raising up in consecrated life have caused us to recognize the need to express in a new way the new with a new language and the creation of original symbolic schemata. This is why we speak of “new paradigms,” “new models,” “new forms,” “refounding” and of “creative faithfulness.” The form of life modifies and shapes the language, and the language modifies and shapes the form of life. It is not strange that the new forms of living consecrated life are changing our forms of expression and organization, and these new words also change our ways of living. Religious life has always been a laboratory of new cultural and organizational models, thus expressing authentic evangelical values in different contexts and in different cultural and religious conditions. There has existed a strong tendency in religious life toward inculturation that is still present in our times and that we should re-actualize (VC 6 & 98).

85. Above all, we have discovered the necessity for new expressions and new methods to announce Jesus Christ and the reign of God for our times.

Consecrated life that recognizes that it is called to share in the great project of the “new evangelization” is conscious that there is need for a “new fervor” or a new spiritual language that unites mission and spirituality, community and individuality, body and spirit. Lastly, it realizes that the option for the poor and excluded is a non-negotiable expression for this new evangelization (NMI 49).



86. Some symbols and symbolic language from the past lose their force and are supplanted by other forms of communication better adapted to contemporary culture. Contact with socio-cultural and ecclesial realities humanizes, renews and adapts us. A different sensitivity is being born among us and the Holy Spirit is carrying us toward new forms of mission and life. All of this requires of us a serious commitment to cultivate this gift that God is giving us.

#### **IV. New Relations in a Church of Communion: Plentiful Fruit from a Well-irrigated Land**

87. The ongoing development of an ecclesiology of communion, which comes from Vatican Council II, has continuously offered invitations to all the members of the People of God to walk together on the paths of sanctity, evangelization and solidarity. The confession of the Triune Mystery and the acknowledgment of the active role of the Holy Spirit in the Church as an expression of fecundity, communion, and missionary dynamism have revealed the richness of the different vocations and forms of life within the Church. They also emphasize the relationship and the reciprocity between them (Cf. L 55). All of this fosters a coming together of these relationships and at the same time foments a modification of these relationships that is making it possible to live deeply as sons and daughters of God, the community and mission inher-

ent in all Christian vocations. Fostering a spirituality of communion as proposed by John Paul II (VC 46; NMI 43; PG 22), is making the Church more visible as a community of believers and apostles, its missionary horizons are being widened, dialogue is made more fruitful in all directions and with various spokespersons, the paths of solidarity are expanded, and what is the same is being lived in the spirit of “the Samaritan” (Ecclesia in Asia 31, 34, 44).

88. Relationships of consecrated persons during these last years have been extended, multiplied and improved. There are more relationships now than in the past. There are relationships not only with the Bishops but also with the laity, and in a special way, with those who share the same charism and mission. There are relationships with diocesan priests who provide connections with the significant aspects of the Christian communities in which they are leaders, as well as with all those who, with good will, work toward the transformation of the world. We consecrated persons join and try to develop networks of solidarity as an alternative to impersonal globalization. We are conscious that this can cause problems and that conflicts can arise. We think that it is our duty to prevent the dangerous effects of globalization and to sustain the initiatives of organizations that work to create this end and encourage a thirst for communion. However, at times we do not know how to live this commitment out and at other times it is not well received.

### **RESPONSE TO THE GIFT: IMAGINATIVE AND CREATIVE STRENGTH**

89. Our Lord invites us: “Do this and you will have life!” We have to put this into action. The Congress invites consecrated life to initiate and continue a new praxis, to take decisive and serious steps forward. In doing this we give ourselves a two-fold goal that corresponds to a two-fold urgency in consecrated life. It will require of us intensity and zeal, in other words, passion for Christ and for humanity. It demands focus and clear goals and objectives. In this section we want to envision and take up the future that the

God desires for us, describing in the best possible way responses that we have to give to God’s proposals.

90. It is not easy to point out what we need to do for religious life to be significant in society and in the Church. Pedagogically, as the Church did before Vatican Council II, it is also wise, to point out what is not working and what is coming to an end, what has no present and even less future. This calls us to put our energy where it is most needed.

91. We will offer some reflections and some questions to orient our discernment in the Congress. The areas in which we are questioning ourselves emerged from the consultation that was made.

### I. Witnesses of Transcendence

92. In a time when the experience of the mystery of God is smoldering and in some cases totally gone out, or in other cases, interfered with by a religious pluralism that is extremely diverse, we feel the call to underline and reveal the inherent religious value of all aspects of life.

93. The religious experience that has been given to us and that we cultivate is an experience of God the Creator, who has acted redemptively in history and has become Emmanuel, by being incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. Thanks to the Spirit who has been given to us, we who possess a vocation to consecrated life try to become a memory of the life style of Jesus of Nazareth. We wish to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth and a manifestation of his passion for God and his compassion for people promoting in all its forms the religious dimension of life, the basic richness to which we contribute and in which we all participate.

94. For us, to announce Jesus with our lives, our gestures, our actions, is the quintessence of our evangelical vocation. For this reason we ask ourselves: *What are the changes that are becoming necessary in our religious, institutional, and communitarian systems to make our lives more evangelical?*

### II. Inculturation

95. Consecrated life will not survive nor fulfill its mission if it is not inculturated in the diverse places and contexts where it exists. To follow the process of inculturation “which entails, discernment, courage, dialogue, and the challenge of the Gospel” (VC 80), is a vital question for consecrated life and a proof of its authenticity.

96. The Spirit is moving consecrated life to diversify, to incarnate, to revitalize itself. These processes of inculturation are demanding, but, when carried out well, they cause the original elements of the foundational charism to stand out.

*What proposals can we make so that this becomes a reality? What are the obstacles that we perceive in the traditional organizational, formational, spiritual, or anthropological models?*

97. The face of consecrated life is changing. Pluricentric and intercultural communion is more and more necessary. We have to learn the new art of communion ecclesiology. Now we ask ourselves: *What consequences does this new perspective have on our structures of government, formation, pastoral experience and cultural and spiritual language?*



### III. Community Life, Affectivity, and Sexuality

98. Life in community is a reality deeply rooted in consecrated life (VC 42, 45, 51). It takes effort to live it well. The “new consecrated life” looks for “new communities.” *What lines should we follow in order to refound psychologically and evangelically our communities to fit these new times?*

99. Within the “distortion of love” which is so evident in our times, our community life could be converted into a means of affective stability and living together inspired by faith and open to complete fulfillment. Relationships would be less rigid and impersonal than in the past. They would allow for adequate manifestations of affection and tenderness and give greater attention and care to physical and emotional well-

being. An excessively erotic mentality and context would, however, be a danger for us. Let us admit that with the help of divine grace we can speak of our life as a reclaiming of the primeval project of God for humanity: *"in the beginning, it was not so"* (Mt 19:8). From this perspective we have a new way of understanding celibacy as an evident consequence of the relationship between genders and a more integrated vision of sexuality. *What would we like to say and do in respect to this?*

#### **IV. Spirituality**

100. We form part of a humanity thirsting for spirituality. The cries for a life in the Spirit are expressed in so many ways that it is necessary that we discover them. Our brothers and sisters expect from us, consecrated men and women, a particular spiritual contribution that affects our language and our experience of life and mission (VC 102). The Spirit is calling us to exercise the ministry of spiritual paternity/maternity in a new way, open to the future, entering in inter-spiritual dialogue not only to give and teach but also to listen, accept, and receive (NMI 56 & GS 92). This is our challenge.

101. This new reality that is being born is affirmed where healthy spirituality is being cultivated. Its basic point is to care for the faith and the prayerful experience of our life. *How do we do this? What do we do to make consecrated life - by vocation and charism - a laboratory of spirituality, a space for the cultivation of the Spirit and the spiritual that dwells in everyone?* (VC 6)

#### **V. Sharing with the People of God and our Pastors**

102. A consciousness of the reciprocity proper to an ecclesiology of communion will lead us to feel interdependent in all forms of Christian life. In a special way, the laity are for consecrated life what the Spirit is raising up: inspiration, support, and accompaniment to help it go forward in a renewed and fruitful manner (VC 54-56; RdC 30-31).

103. Consecrated life shares its charisms with

other forms of Christian living, especially with the laity, and participates with its charisms in the services and ministries that others do. Situated within the living network of the Body of Christ, the Church, consecrated life - especially the members who are women and the laity - can contribute to generating new models of ecclesial identity that demand recognition, encouragement, and integration. From the experience we have accumulated we ask ourselves *what orientations should we follow along these lines of relationship and mutual identification in shaping life and mission?*

104. The mutual communion between pastors, laity, and religious is being felt much more powerfully as an intrinsic demand of openness to the Spirit, who guarantees the organic ecclesial relationship. There is a putting aside or a postponing of institutional interests and pragmatic pretensions. The dynamics of information, dialogue, and participation are spreading through body of the Church in which ministers and charisms have their places and functions. There is more and more sharing of spirituality and concern for the proclamation of the reign of God - two items that are definitely involved. *How do we think, feel, and act together according to the Gospel?*

#### **VI. Capacity for Symbolic Expression Drawn from the Authenticity of our Life**

105. We have lost our sense of the symbolic with the passing of time. The symbolic world in which we find ourselves requires serious adaptation in the realm of meaning. Lack of imagination or fear has changed us into mere guardians of symbols that are either insignificant or merely of museum or folklore value. We are missing adequate expressions for the authentic values that are incarnated and lived in consecrated life. As the Instrumentum Laboris of the Synod on Consecrated Life reminded us "our life has in society a critical, symbolic and transforming function (IL 9). This function demands many changes if it is to be eloquent and effective. We question our significance and ask ourselves: *What language are we using? How are we presenting*

*it? What are we transmitting? How should we live so as to be significant?*

## VII. Poverty and Human Suffering

106. A consecrated life that desires to guarantee its fruitfulness needs to be seen as being in service to accompaniment of and solidarity with those who are in pain or misery. It will have to encounter the path of the Samaritan Woman who, along with all the thirsty, looks for living water in the fountains and the wells of memory and joy. It will also tend the wounded faces without forgetting to continue the fight against violent and unjust systems that are the cause of suffering. *How can we do this? What do we have to say about this challenge?*

107. A return to a life that is lived in poverty, solidarity, and compassion has always been the key element in the process of the historical refounding of consecrated life (VC 75, 82). At present in our society, Mother Earth is being deteriorated by many people who strive to live with as much superfluity as possible. As religious, God is calling us to live only with what is necessary and, if possible, only with what is indispensable. This option allows us to be generous in sharing and giving and free in receiving and requesting. *How can consecrated life promote change from a life based on the superfluous to a life based on the necessary?*

## VIII. The Area of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue

108. We can understand the mission as a movement of the people - a movement inspired by the Spirit towards the reign of God. This is why consecrated life offers something particular to this movement. It bears witness before humanity to the saving project of our Covenant God and becomes for all a symbol of a faithful response to the Covenant. The principle commandment of love, of solidarity, gives rise to the Covenant relationships among all persons. It is expressed through a real commitment to justice, peace, and care for creation. In this historical moment, the communitarian, intercultural, religious, and ecumenical dialogue of life is the name of the mission; it is a question of life or death for all evangelising and missionary activity of the Church. In our institutes we have intuited this for some time now and are looking for new models of missionary insertion and Gospel proposals.

109. The presence and action of religious in the area of dialogue help consecrated life to widen "the space of its tent" (Is 54:2), to be revitalized and to establish life-giving connections. By re-enforcing this presence, we reaffirm the kind of consecrated life that the Spirit is raising up in our times. *What initiatives should we begin to take to shape our mission in lines of authentic dialogue?*



## A PROCESS TO FOLLOW

110. The Congress is a milestone in the history of consecrated life. Will it be a significant moment within this history? We want to affirm this and thank our God for what the Holy Spirit is bringing to birth in consecrated life at the beginning of this new millennium. There is no doubt that a process is underway that will be part of the many other processes that have characterized the sixteen centuries of its history.

111. The fidelity that the Spirit is raising up among us is calling us to guarantee consistency and continuity to this initiative that has begun. For this reason we want to discern, discover, and propose how formation should be shaped to ensure continuity in this new consecrated life and how government should be structured in order to animate this new phase in the development of consecrated life.

### I. A Government for Structural Transformation

112. Consecrated life has structures, organization, and functions of government that correspond to its history, but the future is what we should be building. This requires a profound change in institutional mentality that would make possible the emergence of new institutions and forms of government in which this new life would not be suffocated. Consecrated life in all its forms appears in the Church like a series of energies that is not always taken advantage of, is sometimes wasted, and at other times is repetitive. The internal reorganization not only of each institute but of all institutes, intercongregational dialogue, and bridges of collaboration and integration are clear initiatives to which the Spirit is leading us. However, it is clear that structures have to be “light” and be animated through dialogue, coresponsibility and the Gospel. *What would we propose along the lines of institutional refounding? What should those governing religious institutes do to put the structures of their institutes and projects at the service of the mission?*

113. Consecrated life depends in great part on its

economic structures. A large part of its missionary enterprise depends on money as do its formation processes and its capacity to be global. But it can also be a counter-testimony. Although economy is not the most important aspect of consecrated life, its influence has always been great. All reforms or new forms of consecrated life have paid special attention to poverty and economy. The complexity of world economics and an economic system that is unbalanced and unjust have a notable influence on the economics of institutes. *What can we say about this? How do we shape economies of solidarity? How do we organize an economy that serves the mission?*



### II. A New Formation for a New Form of Consecrated Life

114. We want to shape consecrated life to be authentically “Samaritan,” that is, with a thirst for God and continually moved by compassion. Our responsibility in the face of what the Spirit is bringing to birth among us demands communal discernment (VC 74) and serious commitment to the development and implementation of formative and spiritual guidelines that will make its growth and consolidation viable. In the formative part, the criteria expressed in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, should be followed: “Formation is a dynamic process by

means of which individuals are converted to the Word of God in the very depths of their being and, at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities” (VC 68).

115. The ecclesiology of communion affects formation processes from different perspectives. A model of joint formation is emerging from the People of God and we cannot remain indifferent to its presence. In foundational moments, on

the other hand, formation tends to “go to the essential,” to the heart, the font of life. We are living in a time in which the ecclesiology of communion asks us to learn together - all forms of life - what it means to be “*Christifideles*”. It is only by starting from this point that we will be able to understand ourselves in charismatic co-relationship. *What are the implications of these perspectives for shaping formation processes?*

## CONCLUSION

116. We sense that our forms of consecrated life are in a time of transition; our hearts burn, thirst, and search for the living water especially when we are able to listen when God speaks to us on the way. We experience a passionate love for Jesus and a loving compassion for our brothers and sisters. We feel that we are capable of meeting and recognizing him publicly as the “Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42). We know well that the fire of love can intensify or weaken, widen or be reduced, be contagious or isolated. And sadly, it can go out.

117. We do not want to get stuck in “the glorious past.” Rather we want to cast our eyes to the future, where the Spirit is sending us in order to do greater things (VC110). For this reason, we are not interested in defending supposed acquired rights but rather in serving better in fidelity to our vocation. In this way we are purified and recover a new fruitfulness. In



this way we become more credible in a Church that is being reborn in this “*novo millenio ineunte*”. This is indeed, a challenging demand.

118. We can count on the “promise of the Spirit that makes all things new and intercedes for believers according to the designs of God” (Rm 8:27). We are assured of the compassionate and life-giving presence of Mary, symbol of the fruitful womb, of all life that is born. Consecrated life, when it has wanted to initiate a new phase in its historical journey, has always looked toward and invoked the presence of Mary. Through her and in her it has lived its days of New Pentecost. Under her protection all consecrated persons implore from the Spirit “the fearlessness to face the challenges of our times and the grace to bring to humankind the goodness and the loving kindness of Our Saviour Jesus Christ” (cf. Titus 3:4; VC 111).