

Congregatio Passionis
Jesu Christi

44th General Chapter

Holy Father's message
Conferences
Homilies



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44th General Chapter

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44th General Chapter

John Paul II

to the Superior General Fr. José A. Orbezo

MESSAGE ON OCCASION OF THE 44TH GENERAL CHAPTER

1. I am happy to send you my personal message on the occasion of the 44th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion of Christ, being held at Itaici in the Brazilian State of São Paulo. I send you my cordial greetings which I affectionately extend as well to the Capitulars working with you in reflection and important planning for the Passionist Spiritual Family.

The General Chapter is always a grace event because it challenges you to seek out the genuine roots of the Institute, thus guaranteeing fidelity to its own charism. For your Congregation, it means that you should live today the precious heritage entrusted to all the sons of St. Paul of the Cross. To do this, you must listen humbly to the Holy Spirit, with loving attention to the signs of the times, as you examine, adapt and relaunch the singular gift that God has given the Church and the world through your holy Founder.

2. Your Chapter Assembly is being held during the Great Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000. For the first time, it is being held on the Latin American continent, far from the General House of Sts. John and Paul on the Celian Hill, which my predecessor, Clement XIV entrusted to the Passionists in 1773. In choosing Brazil for your General Chapter, you wanted to pay homage to the great continent in the 500th anniversary of its evangelization; you wanted to emphasize the missionary and worldwide nature of your Congregation; and you wanted to express your solidarity with those areas under the scourge of poverty and injustice. In addition, by this meaningful "pilgrimage of charity," you hope to respond to what I wrote in the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee: "Entrance into the new millenium encourages the Christian community to widen its faith vision to new horizons in proclaiming the Kingdom of God" [*Incarnationis mysterium*, 2]...and moves the disciples of Christ to fervently embrace "the missionary commitment of the Church before today's needs of evangelization" [*Ibid.*].

How can we not stress that from the start of your Congregation, the Jubilee Years have been significant occasions for renewed dedication to serve the Church? In the Holy Year of 1725, while on pilgrimage to Rome, your Founder obtained the first verbal approbation of the new family from my venerable predecessor, Benedict XIII; and in the Holy Year of 1750, with several of his confreres, he preached a most fervent jubilee mission in the Roman church of St. John of the Florentines, for which Pope Benedict XIV expressed great praise.

3. The theological reflection and spiritual climate of this Jubilee, the year of "glorification of the Trinity" and "Eucharistic intensity" (cf., *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 55) offer a providential opportunity of spiritual enrichment for your religious family. It was born in the Church "to promote the grateful remembrance of the blessed Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rule of St. Paul of the Cross of 1775*), the supreme and definitive revelation of the Trinitarian Mystery, and it draws from the Eucharist the energy needed for its entire life to become the memory of and the following of the risen Crucified.

Such a harmony with the jubilee is clear even from your Chapter's theme: "Passion of Jesus Christ, passion for life," which wants to emphasize how, in the light of the Crucified, the meaning of life is to give life in the service of others: "The Son of man has come to serve and give his life in ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

The death of Christ on the cross is the greatest expression of life being given. It opens the door for us to the fullness of eternal life which the Father accords his Son, by accepting his total sacrifice: "The Cross is the superabundance of the love of God which overflows into this world" (*Vita Consecrata*, 24).

That life given for us on the Cross is offered to us in the Eucharist as food. It is human-divine life; it is the life which the Word has taken from the Virgin Mary at the moment of the Incarnation; it is the life glorified in the resurrection and ascension into heaven; it is the life which the Son received from the Father from all eternity.

Receiving in faith, through the Son, the Father's life in the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer is joined by the Eucharist to the same heart of the Trinitarian Mystery.

4. This is the profound reality of faith to which everyone of you, dear Passionists, will surely return in frequent prayer and meditation, in an attitude of humble adherence to the salvific will of Christ. In the Eucharist Christ calls every disciple to be, with his help, "bread broken", as He was, and "wine poured out" for his brothers, always keeping one's gaze on the mystery of his death and resurrection.

In effect, from your beginning, Passionists have given the faithful the precious service of teaching them how to meditate on the Passion of Christ, which your venerable Founder defined as: "the greatest and most stupendous work of the love of God." Many of you have been witnesses, even unto martyrdom, as, e.g., the Bulgarian Bishop, Eugene Bossilkov, Innocencio

Canoura Arnau, and Niceforo Diez and his 25 Companions, all of whom I have had the honor of elevating to the honors of the altar.

Considering the good you have done, how can I not ask you to continue being masters of prayer and special witnesses of Christ Crucified, drawing from the mystery of the Cross the strength to generously nurture the passion for life, above all through dialogue and sharing in your communities? How can I not remind you that such a mission demands courage and joy in facing the problems of religious life in every historical moment? For the believer the lived moment always has characteristics of an "exodus journey," in which is "the inevitable inclusion of what belongs to the *mysterium Crucis*." (*Vita Consecrata*, 40)

The Crucified has loved us "to the end," (Jn 13:1), beyond the measure and possibilities of human love. This is the font from which Passionists must draw their own spirituality in a special way: To love where it is most difficult to love; to love where love is most needed. Today's society offers immense areas for this special apostolate.

In such a context, the preaching of missions, an apostolic tradition of your Congregation since the time of your Founder, also finds its place. By means of this privileged apostolate, you can spread devotion to the Passion of Christ among peoples everywhere. Certainly, it is necessary to think of new pastoral methods to accord with diverse cultures and traditions, but your primary care rests always with the proclamation of Christ, who from the cross renews his invitation to people of every time to follow him with faithful and docile abandonment. Following the example of St. Paul of the Cross, may the Passionist feel his special obligation to offer to the Christian people this exceptional occasion of evangelization and conversion. Popular missions are, along with other means, very necessary in the light of this Jubilee Year. Together with this commitment, do not ever omit, but rather intensify, spiritual exercises to the clergy and people, educating them to cultivate the spirit of recollection and prayer. Let every one of your religious houses, which have been given the meaningful title of "retreat" since your beginning, be a place of contemplation and silence in order to favor the encounter with Christ, our Divine Redeemer.

5. In your Chapter agenda, you have reserved time to reflect on the sharing of your Passionist charism with the laity. This is "one of the fruits of the doctrine of the Church as communion," that has matured in recent times. It is a "new chapter, rich in hope, in the history of relationships between consecrated persons and the laity" (*Vita Consecrata*, 54). It is a sign of the growth of ecclesial vitality which must be embraced and developed. From my heart, I hope that those whom the Holy Spirit calls to draw from the same fonts of your

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charismatic spring can find in you brothers and, above all, guides who will be able of not only sharing your charism with them, but, above all, of forming them in an authentic Passionist spirituality.

I willingly entrust your Chapter work and all your generous undertakings to the Holy Virgin, to St. Paul of the Cross, and to the numerous Saints and Blesseds who enrich the lengthy history of your Institute. May they help you to re-embrace today your original charism, which is a powerful leaven for the realization of the Gospel in the contemporary world.

Thus, while I assure my prayers for you all, for the entire Passionist Family and for those you encounter in your daily apostolic ministry, I impart from my heart a special apostolic blessing on you all.

From Castel Gandolfo, August 21, 2000

Joannes Paulus *II*



MISSION AND EVANGELIZATION TODAY

PASSIONIST FACING GLOBALIZATION,

INCULTURATION & INTERRELIGIOUS INTERCHANGE

William Burrows*

Orientation

As the Passionist Congregation gathers for its Forty-fourth General Chapter, it is important to reflect on the immense changes the world has undergone since the son of Luke and Anne Marie Danei, who would become Saint Paul of the Cross, was born in Ovada on 3 January 1694. By 1775, when Paul died and the Passionist Constitutions were approved by Pope Plus VI, the American and French revolutions were about to begin. Equally important, within a generation of Paul's death, revolts against Spain and Portugal created modern Latin America. As Iberian colonialism crumbled in the Americas, colonialism worldwide entered a new phase as European powers scrambled for ascendancy in Asia and Africa. The second phase of the modern history of Catholic *missio ad gentes* also began at this time. These events and the birth of the industrial age in Europe set in motion patterns that today coalesce in the process we call "*globalization*" the fundamental socio-historical-religious amalgam in which we find ourselves and in which we seek to discern how best to serve God's purposes, the *missio Dei* today.

The fundamental intuition that guides everything that follows revolves around the need of Passionists and the whole Christian community to rekindle faith that our mission is rooted in the cross of Christ and that the cross of Christ is the universal *axis mundi*, the still point in cosmic history around which all else turns. The execution of Jesus of Nazareth takes place on a cross that Christians see as the tree of life. It was planted at a time in the history of the universe when the Jewish people were under the hegemony of Roman power, and Rome is the prototype of the notion that the practical exercise of power to solve complicated problems can ignore the universe's deepest rhythms. Our fundamental mission as Christians is to reveal that the way of the world is not God's way.

My second fundamental point in what follows is that it is not in abandoning the particularity of the Passionist charism that the Congregation will find a renewed passion life, but in intensifying its contemplation of the passion and in allowing itself to be transformed by that contemplation. For in the realm of

holiness, which is what finally all religion is about¹, there exists a great paradox. The more deeply one enters into one's own identity and becomes one with God, the more transparent one is to persons of other faiths and the greater will be the realm for practical cooperation with other persons of good will. To enter into the passion of Christ is to enter into the very passion of life itself, and to be a Passionist is to be dedicated in a special way to following that aspect of the Christian way. In the christology of John, Jesus uniquely incarnates the *Logos* of God. In so doing, he embodies the divine wisdom (*sophia*) that is God present at the beginning of the universe, the fundamental anchor, plan, and principle (*logos*) of the Universe.

The prologue of John's Gospel links the Word made flesh in Jesus to the Word that created at the beginning (1: 1-18). The crucifixion at the first ending of John's Gospel (19: 1-37) is where Jesus's passion becomes the revelation of God and God's way of relating to the world self-sacrificially. Before Christian mission is an attempt to add numbers to our community, it must be a humble quest to enlighten the world about the divine Word from which all originates and to which it returns. This is Christianity's central fact and the source of the Passionist Congregation's passion for life.

Our conversation today is about Christian mission and evangelization carried on by a Catholic religious community in the context of contemporary interreligious interchange and the inculturation of Christianity in a world framed for good and ill by globalization. It has become ever clearer to me that neither our new interreligious situation nor the question of inculturation can be addressed unless they are placed in the context of globalization. Accordingly, in part one of this paper I shall try to unfold a few of the factors that influence mission and evangelization in our globalizing context. In part two, we shall turn to the theological challenge of mission and evangelization in relation to inculturation and our interreligious context. In part three, we will consider questions that confront the Passionists as missionaries of the divine love revealed in the suffering and death of Jesus crucified, died and risen. We begin the most important part of this day when my talk is over and you begin your pre-chapter discussions on how we followers of the crucified One can help God's Spirit reveal to all humankind how the way of the cross is God's way to life.

¹ I know how problematic it can be for many to hear me say that "holiness" is what religion is finally about. First let me say that it is important not to be reductionistic in one's view of what constitutes holiness. My colleague in the editorial department at Orbis Books in Maryknoll, New York, is the author of a book that I invite everyone to read to counteract the notion that holiness can be narrowly categorized. Ellsberg's book presents 365 pages to two-page portraits of both canonized and non-canonized "saints", a number of whom are not Christian, including Mohandas K Gandhi (pp. 53-55) and Jan Hus (pp. 291-92). See Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997).

The overarching context in which we meet in Brazil is well framed by my friend Gerald Arbuckle in the interplay of two words that on the surface seem similar in meaning - "*crisis*" and "*chaos*"². I borrow from Father Arbuckle's vocabulary to state that, in my opinion, we live today between crisis and chaos. A crisis is a situation in which one can discern a potentially favorable outcome, plan for it, and then implement the plan. A chaotic situation, on the other hand is one in which nearly everything appears to be coming "unstuck." Overall our conversations revolve around a convergence of social justice; ecological, economic, communications technologies; and the religious changes that constitute a situation of chaos, that is to say, a moment of challenge beyond the capacity of human agency to control. If this is our context, what are we to do?

1. The Global Context of Christian Mission

Please bear with me as I tell the tale of the years since the founding of the Congregation of the Passion in a way that I hope opens us to a fruitful way of understanding the Christian mission in its historical context. First, it is important to remember that the years when the Congregation was maturing and growing in Europe were also the years of the Napoleonic Wars and the social situation that led to the abortive revolutions of 1848. The aftermath of these events and the European Enlightenment shaped the Europe that endured two world wars in our century, wars that convulsed the world, brought human destructiveness to heights unimaginable in previous history, and then - with the collapse of the Russian Communist Empire and Marxist ideology - brought to an end liberal modernity's pretenses that socio-political engineering could bypass the messiness of economics and mass democracy to rescue the world. That last statement is, I know, highly controverted, for too many still believe that a better global political system, will succeed and that there is a way to prosperity and justice that by-passes the economics of capital formation and entrepreneurial risk taking. What follows revolves around the conviction that the Christian intuition, taking its cues from the wisdom of the cross, as written in 1 Corinthians 1: 18-30 is true. Namely, that a different kind of enlightenment is necessary to bring about justice, peace, and integral salvation for all humankind and for Earth herself.

The early years of the Passionists were also the start of a century and a half period during which the Papacy and national Catholic churches struggled with intellectual currents and social ideals in movements as diverse as the Italian

² See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 43-55; and *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), pp. 65-87.

risorgimento, Marx's formulation of socialist ideals, Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, national socialist fascism, and anti-clerical liberalism. While this was going on, a host of old and new religious congregations struggled to revitalize European Catholicism and began a new phase of overseas mission in Africa, Asia and Oceania. The fruition of that overseas work became evident in the years since between World War II and Vatican Council II. As Karl Rahner has said, we entered into a new ecclesial reality that he called "the World Church" and which was revealed graphically at the Council³. Christian mission from 1492 to 1965 largely resembled the work of an export branch of a large corporation. Since 1965, we have been struggling to understand the *missio Dei et ecclesiae* in a our new context, especially in relation to the inculturation of Christianity in non-Western cultural contexts, the relationship between eschatological and this-worldly salvation, and Christian relations with other religious traditions. Despite great efforts mission's twenty-first century contours has not yet reached a point of clarity, though to me it is clear that it will involve the church's action in reconciliation⁴ and an intensification of a radical inculturation paradigm⁵ that has characterized Catholic mission thought and practice throughout the entire modern period.

To understand our place in a secular context, we need to remember also that while Christian mission was maturing, a Britain that had undergone a curious religious reformation to become neither quite Catholic nor Protestant became the dominant world power. It is hard to know whether the English character caused this special kind of reformation or whether the English reformation is a revelation of a national character formed by amalgamating Celtic, Saxon, and Norman cultures over a thousand-year period of petty and major warfare. But the result was that the English learned to be wary of extremism, adopted habits of pragmatic compromise, and became skeptical concerning "big" ideas. Most of all, they learned the art of resolutely using power to insure that English economic interests triumphed over all adversaries. That pragmatic character came to govern the economic structures and habits that still dominate the world.

For our purposes, it is useful to note that the British view that Christianity was to be honored but kept subservient to the requirements of commerce and

³ Karl Rahner, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716-27.

⁴ William R. Burrows, "Reconciling All in Christ: An Old New Paradigm for Mission," *Mission Studies*.

⁵ William R Burrows, "A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical inculturation," in Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger, eds., *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996): 121-39.

empire was also bequeathed to the world as modernity's dominant view of religion's proper place, honored but not at the table when important decisions are made in the areas of economics and politics. When Britain faltered between 1918 and 1941, her cousins in North America were positioned to continue acting in her stead. The important thing to note is that, although the ideal of fundamental equality of all human beings under God is sincerely proclaimed a core Anglo-American value, the practical policy of raising economic interests over all other concerns rules the Anglo-American way of doing business. That practice still determines the rules of the global system.

In the new interreligious situation revealed by the science of religion, moreover, the academy found no claim on the part of any religious tradition to superiority plausible. While global migration patterns and missionary movements helped Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Indian and Taoist-Confucianist religious traditions become *world* religions in ways that were impossible even fifty years ago, today none of them is able to convince more than one-third of the world's population that it is "true" in a critical-realist sense that compels assent. Although I hope I am not too gloomy in saying so, religion is nicely relegated intellectually and practically to the status of a culturally derived, untestable belief and a matter of individual or group preference. Moreover, at least in the West, that individual preference is understood increasingly as a consumer preference.

Moving closer to home to our identity as Catholics, as we enter the twenty-first century, a great divide exists within Catholicism, as well as throughout the rest of the Christian world. It centers on the question: Is the essence of Christian mission and our vocation the pursuit of an eschatological reconciliation of all in God in the manner expressed in Romans 8? Or is such language best treated as mythological relic of a benighted past, an alienating story that distracts Christians from the mission of alleviating human suffering *today*? Should one instead take one's bearings on the Christian vocation primarily from Luke 4:18-19 (on proclaiming the release of captives and letting the oppressed go free) or from Pauline soteriology? Are they mutually exclusive? Is there a way to integrate the two?

Romans 8, you will recall, stands in one of the earliest books in the Christian Biblical canon, and probably antedates all the Gospels we know today. Yet, early as it is, it embodies a fully Trinitarian christology and soteriology. Luke 4 is read by many as bereft of such mythological baggage.

I telescope a great deal of theological debate in saying that the history of Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council has found that disjunction unappealing. Our conversations have therefore revolved around refining our understanding of how the Christian vocation entails total commitment both to

freeing our fellow humans and Earth from bondage and confessing that the fullness of that liberation comes in a kingdom not yet fully present. The entire debate over the legitimacy of liberation theology, for example, was a debate over how to understand the church's relation to the "both/and" of a this-worldly and eschatological liberation.

These debates have left their scars in religious communities, for most of them have their origin in a late medieval split level world view. The challenge to incorporate a deeper view of spirit within nature and history is not an easy one. In the years after Vatican II, progressives had the edge against the conservatives, but the practical compromises worked out were as painful then as they today seem inadequate. Finding ways to integrate customs and ways of life formed in an age where religious authenticity was defined by *leaving* "the world" into a view of authenticity marked by inserting oneself efficaciously "*in the world*" has proven no easy task, though I think we are near agreement that this is the task⁶. In some communities, what has resulted is less an integration of Pauline and Lucan visions of Christian life than a form of individualistic, bachelor culture.

On another front, ecumenism had the unexpected effect of weakening specifically Roman Catholic traditions of religious life. Be sure that I have no appetite for returning to the former *societas perfecta* idea of Catholicism as a changeless rock, a bastion of orthodoxy against the rest of a rebellious Christian world. Still, dialogue and sharing life with Protestant, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Pentecostal brothers and sisters brought with it a deep realization, that much in Catholicism was the result of historical growth and evolution, not an essential, divinely willed element of ecclesial life. With that realization, large segments of the church, including vowed religious, became skeptical not only of historical accretions but also of solid, inherited Catholic ways of life, spiritual disciplines, and manners of exercising authority.

As religious communities attempt to renew themselves, they realize that the world in which they seek to minister is far from homogenous in religious terms. In Europe, for instance, Catholic religious communities and Christianity as a whole face a situation of virtual religious anomie as large numbers of Catholics, whose allegiance to the church had begun to weaken after World War II, fell away from public participation in church life. The resultant change in the religious landscape of Europe is so immense as to defy analysis. Still recession of Europe from adherence to Christianity is one of the most astounding religious events of our age. It seems clear that if Christianity is ever to gain the allegiance of the masses in Europe, an entirely new inculturation of the Gospel and the church will have to occur. It will occur, moreover, in the context of an influx of

⁶ See Marcello Azevedo, *Vivir la Fe en un Mundo Plural (Estella, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1993)* and *The Consecrated Life: Crossroads and Direction (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995)* for a wise exposition of these matters.

Muslims and the followers of Asian traditions. Scores of millions of Europeans have shifted their religious allegiance to these traditions and to New Age blends of elements picked up here and there. Most of all a new evangelization will have to deal with the sense of large numbers of Europeans that Christianity is *passé*, although by what it has been superseded is not clear.

In North America, matters took a different course. On the one hand, characteristic institutional elements of the Catholic way of being Christian (religious life and the ideal of a celibate, male only the ordained ministry) appear to have lost plausibility for the broad mass of American Catholics, rejected in a movement some call "cafeteria" or "pick-'n-choose Catholicism." Nevertheless, Catholic churches are filled and social studies show great allegiance to what is becoming a distinctive American form of Catholicism. It may well be that the transformations of Catholicism so feared by Pope Leo XIII when he condemned "Americanism" in 1899, are now being realized in the assimilation of many American Protestant ideals by Catholics in an inculturation process that may not be reversible.

Meanwhile, in Latin America, although liberation theology became a vital force for change, it was never as numerically and culturally significant as it appeared from outside. When efforts to control it succeeded, much of Latin American Catholicism reverted to what it had been before Vatican Council II, deeply a part of the cultural landscape but scarcely able to take pastoral care of its people or evangelize them for the kind of individual commitment to the faith that life in an increasingly modern Latin America would demand. Nor was the situation of abject poverty of the majority of Latin Americans altered. By the 1970s one of the largest religious migrations in history assumed critical mass and became evident as countless numbers of Catholics joined Evangelical and Pentecostalist churches. This migration continues. Paradoxically, in the very elements of a "New Evangelization" called for by Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in America*, I detect a call for Catholics to utilize the tactics of Pentecostals and Evangelicals. As a result, to the extent Catholic New Evangelization succeeds, it will also be bringing into its own life a way of construing Christianity that has been altered in a sometimes tumultuous cohabitation and quasi-dialogue with Pentecostals and Evangelicals. The present sclerotic structures of ministry Catholicism seem incapable of enlisting sufficient personnel to carry out the Holy Father's goals. The Latin American picture is not complete without acknowledging that since the early 1970s, a full-fledged dialogue with indigenous peoples has begun, one that has brought to the fore the question of how Catholicism is to be inculturated⁷!

⁷ See Diego Irarrazaval, *Inculturation: New Dawn of the Church in Latin America* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

In Africa, the situation of Catholicism was one of explosive growth in the numbers of the faithful, without however, proportionate growth in the numbers of national priests and religious to take pastoral care of them. A similar growth pattern was experienced also in Oceania. And, while not representing a departure from Catholicism in the way it did in Latin America, many millions of African Catholics began associating with so-called "Spirit Churches" and "African Instituted [often called 'Independent'] Churches" where they found more congenial forms of worship and links to their traditional beliefs and practices than in official Catholicism. Africa, moreover, appears to be the continent most isolated from world economic growth. Its level of misery in the face of HIV/AIDS is mounting. Apparently of little value to the global economy at a macro level, Africa appears to be falling further behind, so much so that when the time comes to become part of the emerging world order, the required changes will be all the more drastic than might have been negotiated earlier. That said, Africa appears to be the continent on which Catholicism is embraced by masses with an enthusiasm unrivaled elsewhere in the world.

In Asia, Catholicism has never been numerically a significant force, and this did not change in the last half of the twentieth century. What did change, however, was the influx of large numbers of Asian candidates for the priesthood and religious life, to the extent that many Asian Catholic churches are now close to self-sufficiency in terms of such personnel and are even beginning to undertake *missio ad gentes* within Asia and overseas. Simultaneously, Asian churches are engaged in both interreligious interchange with religious traditions such as the Buddhist or Indian and attempting to decide what forms are appropriate to Asian Christian life. Also to be recalled is the fact that the word "Asian" makes sense mainly to those outside this immense geographical realm who know little of its incredible diversity. There are, to be sure, certain relatively homogeneous cultural regions within Asia, but the Asian reality is less susceptible to generalization than any other part of the world, and Asian Christianity - in both its Catholic and other forms - partakes of every bit of that plurality.

In every geographical area, classic colonialism of the kind that once ruled Latin America, Africa, and Asia have disappeared since the 1960s, but they have too often been replaced by national elites and kleptocracies that were often much more corrupt and rapacious than the colonial masters they replaced. The inability of political-social-economic systems to make a difference for the marginalized, impoverished masses has perhaps never been as evident as it is today. Even the United Nations Organization is less the symbol of viable world government than the sum total of the member governments' weaknesses writ large. And, although many hold out hope that the ideals of socialism can

ameliorate the negative effects of global capitalism, their faith appears to have little grounding in realistic analysis.

I am not blind to the many wonderful things modernity has brought with it. But what I want to stress here is that is the nearest thing we can discern to be the principle that guides global relations is a pragmatic, economic idea: *It is the view that the world functions best when the practical rationality of men and women making economic decisions on their own is not hemmed in by national or international governmental regulation beyond what is necessary to preserve a fundamental rule of law in regard to contract performance, transparency in accounting practices, and respect for private property.* While there are cultural differences in how a French, a Chinese, a North American, a Malay, or an Egyptian engaged in business will put that principle into practice, the rule of this *laissez-faire* ideology is near universal and becoming more so. It is the foundational principle of globalization. To the extent that any set of ideas ever attains universal power, this pragmatic social and economic principle reveals how the world really functions on a global basis. As gloomy as it may seem, this global rule of this pragmatic principle needs to be understood if we are to understand the global context of Christian mission.

The question arises, what do I mean by globalization? I am led by Vittorio Falsina, a brilliant Italian social ethicist and director of the Harvard University project, "*Recasting Globalization: Religion, Culture, and Ethnicity*," to see globalization as a process involving "*transcontinental and interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power*."⁸ The bottom line in these flows is a relationship between capital and power. They are interchangeable, and their flow (1) takes place increasingly outside the control of nation states and (2) both neglects and worsens the condition of the poor in places where investment returns are felt to be negligible or dangerous.

To this, I must add, an important element of globalization is identified by Roland Robertson as glocalization⁹. For Robertson, globalization is a set of economic, political, informational, and cultural flows but globalization, he maintains, is not necessarily a movement toward homogenization. Rather, the effects of globalization are quite diverse in different local situations and cultures. They are both global in origin and local in impact, hence the word

⁸ In his summary of the Harvard Study, Falsina cites David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 11-22.

⁹ See Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space Homogeneity-Heterogeneity" in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, eds., *Global Modernities* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 1995), pp. 25-45.

glocal. Glocalization is, for Robertson, a hybridizing flow of influences¹⁰. Local hosts (cultures) are not mere passive recipients. In some measure, they determine its local effects, although they do not have the ability decide whether they will be changed by globalization, for the process itself is inexorable.

We turn in part two of this morning's discussion to how we are to carry on our mission in a world in which we are effectively marginalized.

2. The Challenge of Mission as Inculturation in Our Interreligious Context

An Overview

Because the global context of our mission is also glocal, whether it be the attempt to work on social justice and societal transformation issues or the attempt to help local Christians formulate better inculturated forms of Catholic life, it is important to keep both contexts in mind. Global solutions to internal problem within the Congregation or in its apostolates *ad extra* will be largely irrelevant. The statements produced will be beautiful, but will too often cover over the need for local provinces and communities to make painful changes. Still, international gatherings of Passionists and similar communities can be fruitful as venue for increasing global solidarity as men and women with both local experience and global consciousness wrestle with the diverse face of common problems. What is global and should be struggled against, is the tendency of international agencies to relegate religious communities to the position they enjoy in Anglo-American constitutional theory. In other words, to place them a protected area of civil society where they are honored verbally but not taken seriously as bearers of a valid vision of the whole nor of a global ethic that follows from that vision. Even the wealthiest person who believes that Christians and followers of other religious Ways have a role as important as that of business in deciding the future of the world is marginalized in the face of the pragmatic economic bias that prevails in today's world.

It is customary in talks such as the one I am giving today - if the speaker is one who identifies closely with the Gospel call to identification and solidarity with the poor - to treat the agents of the global economic system as complicit in a conspiracy. These persons, the conscientized are prone to say, lead institutions that have no ears to hear the cry of the poor, no eyes to see the wretched of the earth as our fellow humans. There is certainly truth in that judgment. Nonetheless, even the powerful are *victims* of this ideology, dehumanized by its shallowness and encased in a view of life and life's meaning that one can only

¹⁰ Jan Nederveen Pieterse brings out exactly this point in his essay, "Globalization as Hybridization" in *Global Modernities*, pp. 46-68.

pity. They badly need to hear the evangelizing word of God's judgment and mercy in ways that can open their hearts and minds. It is our task as missionaries of the love of God revealed in the crucified Christ to help both the rich and the poor awake to their vocations as stewards of Earth's bounty. John 3:16 must be a perpetual reminder to us that we who follow the Christ must give our lives to bring life. The chief question for a general chapter of an order of Christian brothers, I believe, is how can this community of Christ's followers become more effective as missionaries of that love?

First, there is much to be said for pragmatism as an orientation that attends to the results of ideas and actions. When understood correctly, pragmatism is another name for the process of having experience, seeking to understand it, reflecting critically on it, making judgments on the most adequate courses of action open to resolve a problem, and then acting on the basis of our understanding. The action and its results are, at a second stage, the object of a new circle of observing, judging, and acting; and so on; and so on in an interplay of praxis and *theoria*. Informed by the vision infused in us in faith, strengthening us in hope, and animating us in love, this is the rhythm of Christian life when lived responsibly.

For the Christian, the pragmatic loop of experience, understanding, reflection, judgment, and action is constituted by our being drawn by the Holy Spirit into the circle of those who view life's meaning and ultimate value as revealed in Christ, God-made-visible, the revelation of the universe's paschal and Trinitarian structure. This Christian life is played out both at a personal level, as we seek to grow in grace into the full stature of men and women in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16), always as persons embedded in communities. At a public level, it is important to acknowledge that as followers of Christ we have no particular expertise in how to create an economy that benefits the entire human race. Rather, our vision is one that knows that, unless the economy benefits all, something vital is missing. As a new Israel, Christians know that the standards of social justice set by an Amos and a Jeremiah will be used to judge us if we do no better than the historic Israel of the ninth and seventh centuries before Christ. We not responsible for developing a Christian theory of economics but for ensuring that fully-formed, conscientized Christians, particularly laity, are present when economic decisions are made. Too much talk of the vocation of the laity still sees them as helpers of clergy and religious, not us persons who have a vocation in their own right in the world. In the case in point, economic decision making needs to be pragmatic but also to take into account the wider community in determining what makes a good and just society.

In reality, however, the business world that directs the flows of capital, information, technology, and communication that comprise globalization is

skeptical about what cannot be measured. It has no way to bring intangible cultural, philosophical, and religious insights into its equations, since it sees in this entire area of discourse, a bewildering, dissonant cacophony. All this may change, but it is important for those of us in the business of religion to realize that we are not in the same conceptual room as the decision makers. Even more, international business leaders suspect that we are at best wooly-headed idealists, at worst zealots.

While I fear that some of what Hans Küng has proposed in his Project Global Ethics may insufficiently attend to the kind of basic dialogue among the world religions needed before these traditions can speak with a single voice, there is no question but that he is absolutely correct in saying that if there is no peace among the world religions, there will be no peace in the world. Nor is he wrong in saying that there will be no better world order without a global ethic, and that the only foundation for a global ethic is a transformation of consciousness. Our core evangelical task today, in that context, is one of furthering dialogue and better interreligious relations. Only a transformed consciousness can make our Christian communities sources of life, empowerment for the poor, and enlightenment for the middle classes and the rich on their responsibility to make a fundamental option for the poor and the survival of Earth.

Ultimately, let me say it clearly, it is fruitless to erect a wall between concern for the poor and concern for Earth. Earth is common mother of ourselves and locus of a new kind of *ecozoic* community that we must nurture as a this worldly dimension of the eschatological kingdom if life is to survive on Earth. In raising the issue in this way, I owe much to Father Thomas Berry, a member of the Passionist Congregation and one of our age's wisest prophets¹¹. I have learned much from Berry's and Brian Swimme's insights concerning the fundamental problem facing us as lying in a too-narrow economic pragmatism that thinks the human sphere is more important than the cosmologic. That said, I doubt that the narrow economic outlook is the fruit of Christianity, as Berry sometimes seems to say. Instead, I suspect that it owes more to the tendencies of humans to self-aggrandizement, to a too-narrow sense of self-interest, and to self-deception. These factors embedded in our habitual way of acting are what classic Christian doctrine called the results of original sin. Bernard Lonergan, attempting to bring clarity to original sin as another name for our habitual proneness to self-interest and self-deception, calls our situation one of an "incapacity to sustain development." In his view of our salvation, life in faith,

¹¹ See Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), pp. 4-5, 14-15, and passim.

hope, and love corrects precisely this incapacity when we repent and turn to God¹².

Helping the Holy Spirit bring about that conversion, I wish to suggest, is what the Christian mission is about. Using Juan Alfaro's retrieval of the integral message of Thomas Aquinas to flesh out Lonergan¹³, the transforming vision of life's fullness granted in the interior action of the Holy Spirit that brings about the believer's entree into life in Christ is not an *exitus* from this world to another, but a paschal *transitus* from darkness to light wherein the light of Christ reveals the world in its wholeness. What we know now dimly as God's purposes and presence (1 Corinthians 13: 1-13), we know from the action of the Spirit in our interior being (1 Corinthians 2: 6-16), and that knowledge is firm because "God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5).

What I am driving at is both profound and simple. That the foundation of Christian mission and its ultimate test is the dynamic action of God's Holy Spirit in conversion. In its fullness, mission helps the Spirit to bring men and women to awareness of the "Christomorphic" structure of life in God. A word on why I use the word "Christomorphic" is important. *Morphé* in Greek means form, and I am in effect saying that it is more fruitful to call Christianity "Christoform" or "Christomorphic" than "Christocentric." There is a correct way of understanding Christocentrism, of course, but Christian life is really a process in which the Holy Spirit helps the follower of Christ, in his or her own concrete circumstances, be transformed by participating in the *sophia*, the *logos*, the wisdom of God. Without displacing our subjectivity, an infusion of God's own mind enables us to incarnate the same dynamism as Jesus did, he as equal to God, us as creatures. The ultimate standard of inculturation is whether it is leading an individual or a community deeper into this Christomorphic process. There are many good, perhaps even divinely inspired elements outside Christianity. But what being a Christian is about is letting the Spirit of God transform us on a Christomorphic model. We need to be clear about that or we can become involved in an endless and ultimately fruitless discussions of how globalization intersects with inculturation in our new interreligious context.

¹² See Bernard J F Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York, Philosophical Library, 1958), pp. 630-33, 696-703.

¹³ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, IIA-IIae, q 1, a 1; qu 17, a 6*. See Juan Alfaro, *Fides, Spes, Caritas* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1968), pp. 474-85; *Speranza Cristiana e Liberazione dell'uomo* (Bologna: Queriniana, 1972), pp. 183-211.

Mission and Inculturation

David Bosch's 1991 book, *Transforming Mission* is without a doubt the most significant book on the theory and practice of Christian mission published in our century¹⁴. His book has been translated in French, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Spanish, Japanese, and Russian. Working with Bosch on the book's completion was one of the greatest experiences of my life. Nonetheless, a conversation with Professor Andrew Ross of the University of Edinburgh, an expert on Jesuit missions in Asia and the life of the great English missionary David Livingstone, crystallized in me a lingering suspicion that Bosch's six paradigms of Christian mission had failed to detect and give proper acknowledgment to a dynamic that underlies all of modern Catholic practice, even if it is less prominent in our theory. I refer to the dynamic of a radical dialogue with religions and cultures and the underlying expectation that God's Spirit has been active in these religions and cultures long before the Christian missionary arrived. This taking cultures seriously is a reflection of what David Tracy has called the "analogical imagination" that characterizes Catholicism¹⁵. As opposed to the "dialectical" imagination of how the world is structured in relation to God, the analogical imagination tends to see continuity between this world and the divine. It intuits a structured set of relations in which grace perfects nature and revelation compliments and directs human ways of knowing. There are dangers in this typical view of the world. On the one hand, it can easily slip into a lazy pluralism that does not attend to differences. On the other, if its practitioners have a superficial understanding of Catholicism and culture, they can overvalue matters that are merely customary and not get beneath mere verbal similarities to discern important differences. Both occur regularly.

Viewed historically, the Catholic inculturation paradigm follows and modifies the medieval Catholic paradigm described by Bosch, and is to be seen in an especially clear manner in the work of four great early modern Jesuits, Alessandro Valignano, Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili and Alexandre de Rhodes. Their work is more honoured today than it was in the first two hundred years after their death, when their work was suspect and elements of it condemned. But the Catholic approach to inculturation is far more pervasive than the church has been able to overcome. If I may take my own case as typical, in studying the lives of the four Jesuits named above in recent years, I realized that in the Society of the Divine Word even before the Second Vatican Council we were told the Jesuits were mostly correct and the Roman Curia

¹⁴ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

¹⁵ See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 405-38.

mostly wrong. Criticisms of the Curia were couched carefully, since the SVD was careful not to dissent publicly from official teaching and discipline. Still I never heard anyone in the Society defend Propaganda Fide. My point? That the inculturationist paradigm and the sense that the faith needed to be rethought in new cultures had an important though partially invisible life in the mainstream of Catholic missiology. What Robert Schreiter notes in regard to problems involved in sorting out the criteria of authentic local theologies leads me to observe that *who* decides what is valid often predetermines *what* will be decided¹⁶. In retrospect, one sees that Valignano, Ricci, de Nobili, and de Rhodes had embarked on a program of reconceptualizing Christian identity for the Chinese, the Indian, and the Vietnamese cultural worlds in ways that mirrored the way that one of Christianity's first inculturations took place when the Hellenization of Jewish Christianity produced Catholicism¹⁷.

What deserves special consideration in an age of globalization is the need to avoid static and antiquarian ideas about culture. Tanzanian and Indonesian cultures are no more settled than Polish or Canadian. Cultures have always changed, but globalization is speeding up that change in dizzying ways. The challenge of inculturation is no easier in North America than it is in Zimbabwe. Yet it is as common to hear North American and European Christians talk about the urgency of inculturation in Thailand and Papua New Guinea as it is uncommon to hear them speak of the need for it in Switzerland, Wisconsin, or Spain.

What is a congregation such as the Passionists to think about their mission in the context of inculturation? There is no simple answer. Perhaps the most important thing is to realize that there are no recipe books. The next thing is to realize that in an important sense, the cross is always an affront to any culture. Human cultures are, in many ways, an attempt to make us forget the inevitability of death. But it is one thing to be counter-cultural in opposing sickness in a culture and another thing to be anti-cultural by simply having antiquated, contrarian beliefs and habits¹⁸. I leave it to the discussion period to decide whether your local community, province, or the entire congregation is more counter-cultural than anti-cultural, but the distinction is important.

At another level, in what we once called "mission" situations, the most effective thing expatriate religious working outside their own cultures can do is

¹⁶ See Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 96-101; 119-21.

¹⁷ Get pub data on Andrew Ross, *Vision Betrayed* and Peter Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*.

¹⁸ I owe the insight and the vocabulary distinguishing between counter-cultural and anti-cultural attitudes and actions to Stephen Bevans, SVD, the Luzbetak Professor of Mission and Culture at Catholic Theological Union.

to master languages, be eager to learn new ways and infinitely slow to criticize. The evidence seems to indicate that this *sine qua non* of cross-cultural mission may be disappearing, particularly in areas where English has come to be a lingua franca for the educated. The next thing is that religious should not be bashful about working to root their congregations and insuring that indigenous candidates for the congregation are the absolute best young men that the Catholic community can offer. In saying this, I intend in no way to downgrade the priority of training laity and founding a vital diocesan clergy. There is evidence, I realize, that some congregations have recruited Africans, Indians, and Filipinos, for instance, to provide domestic help for European monasteries and convents.

Although it has been many years since I have worked in formation, lessons learned when I worked with a culturally and spiritually sensitive Australian Missionary of the Sacred Heart in 1975 in Papua New Guinea stand out and may bear repeating. Martin put great store in the next thing I commend for furthering the inculturation process. First, expatriates in such situations need to be friends with the local candidates, for only in true reciprocity of affection and respect can the old adage that heart speaks to heart work out, *cor ad cor loquitur*. Only in such relations can a congregation find ways to inculturate its charism and ethos. This, Martin felt, often meant standing back and letting local religious go, once one had discerned with them that the deepest movements of their souls and the spirit of the Gospel were one.

This rests on an important sociological principle that religious congregations need always to keep in mind. *They are not the whole church*. They are a part of the church, a free association of men or women whose rule has been approved. Part of their freedom is the freedom to experiment with more effective ways to incarnate their charism. Religious communities, in other words, can function as *mediating organisms* between a people and the World Church and vice versa. Because their members live intimately, they can also be important testing grounds for inculturation. But the way in which priests predominate in male religious life can be an obstacle. To gain and maintain faculties, priests must adapt themselves to diocesan church regulations. They do ministry not in their own or the congregation's name but as collaborators with the bishop. While I have no quarrel with priests being religious, the risk that the priestly tale wag the congregational dog is real. Brothers' ministries may often be much more fruitful in inculturational terms when they are active at grassroots levels, for there they must work on other people's terms.

Ultimately, then, what I suggest in terms of inculturation is that one of the greatest services a congregation can do is not in leading an inculturation process as a whole but in helping root the congregation in the soil of Nicaragua, of the Altiplano, or the Bushveld. The Catholic Church appears monolithic from

without, but from within it is precisely congregations such as the Passionist, the Franciscan, and the Redemptorist that intensify and bring to concreteness aspects of the Gospel that are needed to make the church catholic in an *intensive sense*. And by intensive catholicity I mean an embodiment of the whole Christ in his many facets. The way a relatively small Bolivian province of an international congregation reveals how the cross and resurrection of Christ are truly the *axis mundi*, could be the greatest contribution that handful of men ever makes.

Mission in the Present Context of Interreligious Interchange

My doctoral dissertation was on the Roman Catholic Magisterium's doctrine on "other" religious Ways. I will not bore you with the details, but when I began it in 1980, I added the subtitle, "Analysis and Critique from a Postmodern Perspective." Although the word "postmodern" is used too often twenty years later, what I meant by it is still relevant. In my analysis of the pre-Conciliar Papal and the Vatican II Conciliar magisterium, I concluded that the four key texts of the Council had moved the Church from a position of negativity to non-Christian religious traditions and relative openness to non-Christian cultural and philosophical traditions to a position that I termed *irenic ambivalence*. I still think that judgment is about right. Catholic doctrine and attitudes are irenic toward other traditions because they see in them elements of grace and truth. They are *ambivalent* because Christ remains the one in whom we know God in faith. That far one can go by faith.

Where postmodern thought offers us light concerns the fact that our faith is a distinct, positive, historically conditioned vision of that which no human eye has seen nor ear heard, nor heart comprehend - Infinity, the Absolute, the nature of the Divine, and the shape of the Whole. From a philosophical point of view, one can claim universality and can argue for the superiority of Christianity but such reasoning falls flat. And while a Christian philosopher does her best to show the doctrine of purposeful creation of a universe that participates in the intelligent final cause, a score of Indian traditions have logics as developed as our own that reach far different conclusions. The Dalai Lama can be kind and tolerant of Christians because he knows they have an infinite number of lives to correct their fundamental mistakenness about the dynamic state of nothingness one enters through enlightenment. Each philosophical position is a relatively adequate apology for the religious vision it explicates. Taken together, though, what they reveal is a world in which (1) at a philosophical level, one needs to say that there is "rough equality" among the religions; and (2) that there is a conceptual chasm between the traditions that comparison of fundamental concepts or ethics reveals a state of "incommensurability" in regard to their ability to talk about their deepest intuitions.

What does this mean for Christian mission in a postcolonial age when the sensitivities of Asians and Muslims in particular are rubbed raw by centuries of Western domination? Second what does Christian *missio ad gentes* mean in a world so bombarded by conflicting claims that a grey noise threatens to blot out all meaningful conversation? And for Catholics, what does it mean to be in mission when it often puts us in competition with swarms of free church Evangelicals and Pentecostals whose numbers of young, motivated men and women and financial resources dwarf our own?

My first answer to these questions may seem inadequate, but it comes down to a judgment that we will do well to emulate our monastic ancestors in mission by creating communities with deep roots in native soil and wings on which the Christian spirit can soar in the celebration of the paschal mystery, deepening their appropriation of Christ. Our role today, I believe, is not one of denigrating or weakening any other tradition in order to gain more converts. Rather, our goal ought to be forming fully conscientized Christians who will be effective citizens in a pluralistic world that needs to learn more effective ways of transcending self-interest, oppression, and the darkness of unbelief.

We seem to have rid ourselves of the notion that mission is primarily a matter of making converts. I am not sure we have arrived yet at a state of tranquilly being a part of local communities of Christians, learning to celebrate the Christian mysteries in local languages, with local art forms in music and dance. As parts of such communities, our international connections may make it possible in places like Uganda or Karnataka to become the mediators of better agricultural or water management techniques in a loving dialogue of life. It may lead as well to fruitful contact between Muslim imams, Hindu sannyasi, and Buddhist bhikshu when they know we are there as friends, and not as marketers seeking to supplant homegrown products.

What my studies in Christian relations with others ultimately brought me to is twofold. First, a sense that all the traditional means of demonstrating Christian superiority are passé and probably not very effective even when they seemed most plausible. But second, that Christianity is intrinsically missionary and if it or a religious congregation loses that missionary ethos, it is no longer fully Christian. The fundamental horizon of Christian mission today, let me suggest, is less that of expanding our franchise and more one of bringing about peace and reconciliation among the world's peoples. In that kind of context, conversions will undoubtedly occur, but the process will be organic and the fruit of dialogue. And the reality is that there are today as many Christian converts to traditions such as Islam and Buddhism as vice versa. I would sum up twenty years of reading and study in the area of theology of religions by paraphrasing my friend and Orbis author Jacques Dupuis. It is the Christian mission to make Christ manifest, but we need to go much further in dialogue before we can say more

than that God's Spirit does seems to be active outside the visible, historic Christian church. And then that we need to envisage the possibility that the final horizon of religious relations is to be realized in eschatological convergence in complementarity, not by an achieving unity in the Christian church¹⁹.

3. Passionists as Catholic Religious Missionaries Today

It is time to conclude with several remarks that I hope will prove fruitful for opening the discussions that will occupy us the rest of this day.

My first remark concerns the priority of witness by holy men and women over ideas and plans, while insisting that it is only in dialogue with the world of ideas that we will be able to insert ourselves in the arenas that John Paul II so provocatively calls the "new areopagi" of mission in *Redemptoris Missio*, 37. Where it might once have been thought sufficient to give young men and women a good education and ground them in spiritual practices that would keep them in their faith and congregation, mission today requires a level of personal authenticity and holiness that goes far deeper. They will also have to be able to insert themselves into these areopagi and then hold their own ground.

Second, in an age of globalization, religious communities with their deep embeddedness in local contexts and their international connections, should never underestimate their importance. The partnership that religious have within their communities and their ability to network with other communities is perhaps the most organic and vital connection that exists today to counteract both religious intolerance and the negative effects of globalization. Religious communities are by their very nature mediating forces on the global scene. They need to find ways to set priorities and then act on them, always aware that glocalization is the other face of globalization.

Third, I believe that Gerald Arbuckle is fundamentally correct in his book *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations*, when he says that "refounding" is the proper response to our situation of chaos. If I read him correctly, moreover, this will not be the work of a balanced, multinational, multiethnic committee carefully established by a general council to insure that every segment of the society is represented. Rather, it will come as individuals and groups of individuals imbued with the charism of congregation respond to the prompting of the Spirit and step out into patterns that go beyond the settled anti-cultural habits of yesteryear. The Congregation will follow its trail blazers or wither.

¹⁹ See Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1997), especially chapter 13, "The Reign of God, the Religions and the Church" - chapter 14, "Interfaith Dialogue Praxis and Theology," pp. 330-84; and the concluding paragraphs, "Convergence - Historical and Eschatological," pp. 389-90.

44th General Chapter

Fourth, may I pose a challenge that shows I have not lost faith in God's ability to work even through theologians? One of our greatest problems in preaching the way of the cross as a way of life today in the West is the *deus ex machina* character of our theology. In the world of Frankish tribes or Mediterranean concepts of honor, it made sense to speak of the death of Jesus appeasing an angry God. It was a concept that fit with these cultures. Today that view of the atonement reaches virtually no one, yet the cross remains much more than an image, it is a *symbol* that encapsulates the shape of reality and humankind's relation to the cosmos and its divine ground. If Passionist theologians could explicate the way in which the cross of Christ and the New Universe Story of your confrere Thomas Berry converge on an entire new cosmology, the way would be clear for a vital dialogue on inculturation and interreligious interchange. Indeed, it would provide catechists, liturgists, the entire church with a paradigm of the Christian life as an *insertion* into the world with a distinct identity, not a *flight* from it. It could entice a new generation of men and women to join the Passionist family as priests and brothers, as laity, and as sisters.



PASSION OF JESUS – PASSION FOR LIFE.

Octavio Mondragón, C.P.

Introduction

The general chapter of the congregation takes place within a highly charged time, characterized on the one hand by the celebration of the jubilee year and on the other by the amazing epochal change which is our major challenge at the beginning of this third millennium. This reflection aims to make a link between the elements implicit in this situation and face them with our distinctive Passionist vision.

First off, using the image of Moses as our paradigm, we will propose a set of narrative criteria that should offer some light and help us tackle the topic of our life and times. Secondly, we will try to present some elements of Passionist discernment, which might help to form a context for our chapter. The third section of our conference is a call to listen to some alerting voices about significant elements related to living amid the epochal changes, which we are living through. Our final section deals with some pathways of paschal power through which the congregation is asked to move in the coming years, and which may offer a valid basis for the charismatic renewal of Passionist life today and tomorrow.

1. The Testament of Moses: a choice between life and death

The book of Deuteronomy can be read under the key of a renewal of covenant between Yahweh and the People of Israel. The book may also be read under quite a different heading – as the testament of Moses.

In fact, it appears in a most dramatic setting. The old prophet, liberator of his people and servant of God, this holy man is about to end his days, aged 120 years during which his life has seen three great changes, this man confronts with his whole experience the specter of physical death and the shadow of absolute annihilation: he will not enter the land of his people's new history and new life.

Moses scans the horizon and before his eyes arises the profile of the promised land, there near to him stands the newly emerging generation, at one step from its inheritance, faced with the challenge of building a new life, a new society, an alternative which will put closure to the misery and suffering which marked their long history in Egypt.

Amid the protagonists he sees above all the sovereign presence of Yahweh, the journeyer, the desert pilgrim. It is He who carefully observes the transition. There in that tiny extent of land, He is ready to complete the wonderful actions,

which will bear so much fruit, like Shalom, rest, inheritance and a new way of living.

The aged Moses contemplates this privileged moment, one so oriented towards the future. At this final moment of his life he is confirmed in his basic conviction: he can bid farewell to his life and does so with all the dignity that marks his heart. The One who had made him had been an irresistible presence, the one who had strengthened him was a fidelity without limit, it was his own Yahweh and His was the presence that had provided him with a sure foundation and an impossible dream: the other life, the other history.

On the other hand, and equally important since he had realized the suffering of his brothers, a firm bond had linked him to a faceless and nameless multitude, through whom and with whom he had learned about the other side of life, had learned about that which spoke against the life lived in the Pharaoh's court in Egypt; learned to see reality from the darker side and from this apprenticeship new commitments had been born.

With them he learned to hear the unheard; with them he came to know the terrible experience of being other; among them he discovered that another Moses could arise from the life he had denied. In their midst he perceived that beyond all appearances lay the possibility of another life which was not that of mortal time and space.

This conjunction of Moses and the people did not come by accident, neither was it mere fate; it was an act of constitutive revelation. From that moment on, the adventure of his life was played out in the first person plural. With them he knew that their common life was a Passover crossing, that is, that once they were united there was no other future than to pass from death to life. For this reason he was prepared to join his destiny with theirs, to join their wills, to reconcile opposites in order to break into this other history. An immense passion took possession of him to the marrow of his bones – a passion for life – and by its force he was able to infect a whole people and set them on the march towards the byways of Yahweh's own Passover.

This Moses passed from being a courtier and accomplice of the dominators, a popular hero, to be transformed into a prophet of the troublesome God. We cannot simply describe Moses as a religious man, one who knows the divinities round about. Rather we should clearly see him as converted into a prophet of another God, a prophet of Yahweh.

He himself had to make a real paschal crossing away from the common theology of the orient, into a quite new theology, which could not come into being without his participation. Moses did not learn a set of religious truths, that he could simply teach to the people in order for them to become a religious

people. Rather he had to be “re-made” and become a new human being, when the irresistible power of Yahweh flooded his person. This was his real secret.

A vision dragged him away from his previous perspective and enabled him to see in a completely different manner. Life emerged in quite new colors and with a new focus, that which shines out from the eyes of Yahweh. An unknown voice brought him into a conversation from which he learned to hear and to pronounce. In the midst of it he was brought into an intimate communion through which his life and whole history reached its finality.

In this first communion the presence of Yahweh invaded him and he was enveloped in a cloak of miracle and paradox. It became clear that this God behaved as lord in a manner diametrically other than that which up to now Moses had taken for granted. Moses’ first realization was that Yahweh reveals himself by involvement and involves himself by revealing. This property of God which in his very self is a new manner of expressing himself to himself, is even more paradoxical because he is totally, passionately involved. As Abraham Herschel would say, the pathos of Yahweh is reflected in the person of Moses and in his presence the proper response is “sympathy”, letting oneself be involved in the Lord’s Pathos for human beings, for life and for history.

There is no other way to be re-dimensioned as a human being than by pathetic involvement with this very Yahweh, and this not from without with someone other, as though the lord were an object, but from within, as with a sovereign activity in progress. The worst temptation regarding this Yahweh is to imagine him as an object of knowledge, substituting for this primal communion a religious Gnosticism that would result in an average God, or what is properly called idolatry.

The most surprising aspect of this communion into which Moses was admitted is that Yahweh is involved, but involved through hearing. “Yahweh hears the cry of the poor of history”. Though it may seem audaciously anthropomorphous to say so, Yahweh himself is implicated by having listened, by letting himself be moved by the cry arising from the throats of those who, in the wretchedness of their lives, call on some ultimate one who can vindicate them and answer their request.

What the Gods of Egypt never heeded was this cry. The Egyptian system ignored the suffering of the forgotten ones, the clearest indication that something was dysfunctional in history and society. This “perfect” system of which they were so proud was now being severely called into question as a distortion of life, by those whom up to now they could ignore with impunity. The most interesting aspect of this is that the people of the bible bring this problem into articulation, and attribute their insight to the heart of Yahweh himself. Their declaration of faith is: “Yahweh has heard our cry. That is what our Yahweh is like!”

On the other hand, Moses learned to live as interlocutor with Yahweh through all those endless days in the desert, where no living things grow, amid continual crises, a secure and sovereign voice gave him fixity of hope and directed his steps with those of the people. Even in this desert testing-place, he knew they would emerge into the pathway of life. Later, Jeremiah could speak of those days as the springtime of love between Yahweh and his fiancée, the people.

Clearly, this kind of language leads us directly into the great biblical theme of Covenant. Prior to all notion of norms and rules, living by the covenant means to have lived the experience of humbly walking with Yahweh, the experience that the bible so well describes in relation to Abraham, the Father of all believers. Before temple, cult or torah existed, and prior to any coherent religious system, Abraham and Moses went through a covenant experience, that is, the experience of primal communion, the experience of believing. Much later, Saint Paul would take this as the basis for the new form of life, which he promoted among the gentile churches, defending their full right to live in covenant with the Father of Jesus, the Messiah.

The privilege of Moses was nothing less than to bring his people into the open space of the covenant with Yahweh, this unmistakable Yahweh who was prepared to create something quite new. The prophet internalised what he had experienced and from this experience arose both his message and his whole future manner of living.

“Behold, today I set before you life and good, death and evil. Today I call to witness against you heaven and earth. I place before you blessing and curse. Choose life and you will live, you and your descendants, loving the lord your God, listening to his voice, relying on him, for he is your life and your length of years in the land which he promised to give to your Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Dt 30, 15-19).

In these phrases, so typical of eastern covenants, it is clear that not only the present, but also the past and the future are at stake. All is summed up in one category: Life. The testament of Moses is the purest affirmation of Life in the face of death. It calls for one primary decision: choose Life.

The congregation is preparing to enter on the new pathways of the third millennium, wishing to enter a new land like a people called together by God. The trailblazing figure of Moses can serve us as a great paradigm, as we face the challenge of defining what is the testament that our congregation wishes to leave to the next generations of Passionists.

2. The Passionist Congregation Today – faced with the choice between life and death

Since the start of preparations for this general chapter, a part of the plan was to create an environment for a clear discernment within the Congregation, and we began with the idea of telling each other about our lives.

It may be that many of our brethren feel disconcerted, at first sight, by the generality of what is usually called the theme of the chapter. And yet there is nothing more serious or definite than to probe into the story of what the Spirit of life is creating in the midst of the *avatars* or phenomena of history. I am convinced that this is nothing less than a fundamental attitude of all personal and communal life, which seeks to define itself as Christian and charismatic. What is in question is to place ourselves at the disposal of the Spirit in a situation, which in many respects may be seen as an epochal change.

While in many respects the reading of the change of an era may be charged with ambiguities and shadows, still it would be very sad if we simply left it to others to tell us what is happening in our history – since it is part of our congregational inheritance to practice the Passionist discernment which springs and grows from the *Logos tou Staurou*.

A number of theologians, Passionists and others, have maintained that the Cross of Jesus is the radical critique of all ideologies and idolatries. The cross requires and – as a critic of the wisdom of this deception – it actually produces an epistemological rupture but with regard to the subject who seeks to understand and to the idea content which is being expressed. In other words, that Passionist discernment within which we hope to celebrate this chapter of the congregation, invites us to face up in a specific way to what is happening in our world.

There’s a dubious piety which would take as its starting point the notion that we are doing well as human beings, as Christians and religious, while the other people are doing badly. We must unmask the kind of ingenuous self-complacency according to which things will of themselves reveal an adequate response to the changed times we are going through. We shall be unable to confront the reality that surrounds us if we approach it with a *light* theology, ignoring the revelation of the paradoxical and contradicted wisdom of God expressed in the crucified Messiah.

We must also unmask a kind of modern security which imagines that our minds are already apt and suitable for understanding and responding to the challenges of our time, when the wisdom of the cross proposes first the restructuring of the knowing subject, and regards history as the place for theological-staurological reflection.

To narrate life implies that we dispose ourselves first and foremost to be pronounced by the word of the cross; that we allow ourselves to be defined and remodeled by God and the Spirit, through this definitive word-event of the crucified Messiah. At the very least, it requires that we adopt the attitude of the Servant of Yahweh. “the Lord has given me a disciple’s tongue, so that I may know how to speak a comforting word to the lowly. Each morning he opens my ear, that I may listen as a disciple. The lord opened my ear; I did not resist nor draw back, but offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard. I did not turn aside from spitting and outrage” [Is 50,4-6].

To listen to the Lord and the Spirit speaking through the crucified Messiah means to personally learn the implications and form of God’s involvement with history, with human beings, the world and life itself. What we call the passion for life has its roots not in ourselves but in the passion of God himself, revealed in stages, up to the point where he is prepared to fully give his life for a great cause, as saint Paul affirms.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I now live, not I but Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [Gal 2,19-20]. For this reason and no other, Paul can therefore state: “as for me, God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world” [6,14-15].

It is impossible not to realize that staurological discernment in face of epochal change is our trade-mark, by which is not meant that we have a monopoly on such discernment. Without this trade-mark we would lose our specific identity, and be diluted by insubstantial attitudes and lines of thought which cannot give form and body to the principle of reality.

At what point are we involved in the life of today? It seems clear to me that the highest point of our involvement is to share in God’s own involvement, manifest in the death of Jesus the Messiah. Our task is to embrace life from the primal experience of having been caught up by God and by the Spirit into the cross of Christ.

“Therefore, we no longer judge anyone by outward appearances, and even though we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer see him in this way. Therefore, wherever the Spirit is there is a new humanity. The old has passed away, the new has come” [2 Cor 4,16-17]. This corresponds with the paschal dynamism of the Spirit who renews the face of the earth. The Spirit does not *invent*, it *renews*; and this it does according to the paradigm of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified messiah. That is how one can acknowledge the Spirit as the Spirit of life. In accord with this, what we are attempting is not a mere diagnosis of reality, but to enter into a pathway in the spirit, at the disposal of the spirit.

3. Some vital underlying ideas

3.1 The new relationship between faith and culture. Aspiration of the young generation

Behind the whole complex web of reflections about globalization globalism, about the tensions between the global and the local, about neo-liberalism and postmodernism, we should try to detect some key underlying ideas which characterize this change of epoch into which, along with all others on this planet, we are entering.

Having listened and reflected about this matter in various forums, I believe that there is a fundamental reality which should claim our attention both as Christians and as religious. Without trying to list each of the individual factors that go into forming this diagnosis, it is of particular interest to notice that from the perspective of young people, of postmodernism, of the renaissance of the sacred, of the multiplication of all kinds of religious movements, of the widespread attitude of indifference or non-involvement with history and society, one common factor seems to lie at the root – and this is the relationship between faith and culture.

Once again there is an acute need to study the relation between the fact of believing in the God of Jesus Christ, and the cultural reality in which we live today. Apparently the concrete forms by which this relationship was expressed in the past are obsolete or no longer coherent; and this puts into question the very possibility or at least the concrete form of maintaining faith within our situation of epochal change and shifting cultural paradigm.

The young generation feels this spontaneously, without systematic thought, at the intersection of their emotions and external appearances. This is something of extreme importance affecting their existence, and which is often expressed through silence: the great distance between the form of belief in God and the actual forms in which life is expressed within today’s culture. They feel the whole business of faith as something which has no prospect of continuing into the future.

This has its influence not only on the specific area of the formation of young Passionists; it affects the whole conjuncture of faith-life – and of course, the meaning of the current reality of church and of religious life within it touches our Passionist life at its very roots.

Many theologians have said this, and I must repeat it within this context: the future of religious life, and of the church and of every religious movement will depend on our capacity to capture a true experience of God in Jesus in relation to the ever-changing and rapidly changing reality within which we live. We are not starting from absolute nothing, but I think we must honestly accept

that many of our forms of expressing faith are meaningless and do not correspond to the present moment in history.

I believe this is basic: from a sense of honesty towards the real, the Passionist congregation, like other practitioners of the event of faith, is called by the Spirit of God to enter into a deep path of purification and reconciliation, in the deepest sense of those terms. It would be shortsighted to reduce this merely to the level of strategy or pastoral practice. What is in question is not simply our role as communicators of the word of the cross but also our style of life and the total witness of our Passionist way of life.

3.2 The presence of women and the question of gender

When from the heart of neo-liberalism Francis Fukuyama declared the end of history, he may have failed to take account of two basic facts of our world: the painful reality of victims and the question of the situation of women.

On the one hand, all are aware of the large-scale movement created by women world-wide, vindicating their rights to dignity and participation – and how they are bringing forward their own ways of thought and reflection, which have emerged from feminism but now pose the gender question for all of us. On the other, our own theological reflection enables us to offer some useful helps in coming to grips with theology seen from women's point of view. In the biblical area, it is interesting that the Pontifical Biblical Commission had to accept the feminist reading of the Word of God among the various ways of reading the bible. This responds to a growing fact that every day new feminist ways of reading the text are emerging and this way of understanding is struggling to call into question various aspects of ecclesial life which it sees as male-dominated. Reflection upon gender questions is producing a new anthropological discourse and seeks to correspondingly reshape and reform the human reality.

It would be useless to try to evade this reality – it is simply increasingly there as a fact. What is our stance in this regard, not just as men but as the Passionist family? Are we ready to not simply be onlookers at the emergence of a feminist theology of the cross, but to take up the challenge posed by this phenomenon? This faces us with the consequences of welcoming the role of the laity in sharing the adventure of our Passionist charism. Women are here not just as a presence but as a challenge and an alternative reality. What should be our stance in this regard?

3.3 The poor and their constant claim: the right to life

If there is one major disharmony that distorts the present world “order” it is the globalization of poverty. On all sides and in all countries we find the malign

specter of poverty, the cry of its victims. Various attempts have been made to silence this cry and calm the consciences of the well off, by claiming that it represents only the viewpoint of a voluntarist or sociologist theology – the kind of muzzle that was imposed on the theology of liberation.

When in the Word of God we seek out confessions of faith, where Israel articulated its experience about this disconcerting God who calls himself Yahweh, we find that they could clearly proclaim something specific and unmistakable about the form of Yahweh’s presence. “my Father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt and dwelt there few in numbers. There he became a great and numerous people. The Egyptians maltreated and humiliated us, and laid on us a hard slavery. We called to the Lord, the God of our Fathers, and the lord HEARD our voice; he saw our misery, our labors and our oppression. The Lord drew us out from Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with mighty signs and wonders, and he brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land of milk and honey.” [Dt 26,5-10]

Yahweh the Lord, in distinction to the gods of Egypt, is recognized as the one who hears the cry of the poor. When we say that Yahweh hears, we are trying to express that Yahweh reveals himself in involvement, and involves himself in revealing. In the semantic field, the verb *Shema* [to listen] has as a primary meaning to have been changed by a voice and to respond to the challenge which is expressed in this voice of the victims. Whoever has entered into the pathways of the experience of God will know unmistakably that the first thing one experiences in God’s presence are not doctrinal truths but one is grasped by the passionate and just love flowing from the Lord, and that life is loved with the radicality of an absolute love and justice. For Yahweh at least – and this is a vitally important lesson – life is sacred.

To believe in this Lord, the Father of Jesus and our Father, produces an effect of trust and of belonging. *Trust*, in the sense of having finally met with the most primal communion, the primordial space from which all life and meaning is born. *Belonging*, in our decision to walk with Him, as joy in sharing in His actions and in the manner of his performing them. Not for nothing did Jesus solemnly declare, as he broke the Sabbath law in order to restore the afflicted life of the poor and the sick: “My Father works until now, and so I work”.

The question of defending the right of the poor to life cannot be limited to simply asking *how* and *how much* we love them, because we will always find excuses to calm our anxiety and silence the cry of conscience – but must be faced in its radical theological and historical dimensions, that is to say, in relation to the poor and the victims themselves. What is needed is to see it as validating how and how much God continues to love them – this God who is our Father in whom we believe, in whom we are prepared to share in his ways and his loves.

The sad reality of our poor brothers and sisters can be a revealing force for us, since it sharply faces us with questions such as, “In what kind of God do you believe? To what God do you cling? With what God are you prepared to pass your days, whether many or few?” Once these revelatory questions are posed in this way they leave us (as congregation, communities or individual believers) with no alternative than to give an account of the God who dwells within us. In fact, our very behavior, our life-style is already a response to these questions, and if we have courage and honesty enough to admit when and in how our way of life does not shape up to that of Jesus, then we will recognize what must die within us in order that a better form of life – one that more truly manifests our belonging to the God of Jesus – may be born in us.

If the cry of the poor for their right to life comes before the ultimate judge of history, who is God himself, then they can count on His gift to them of a willing and compassionate ally on their side: the Passionist congregation, born of the Passion of God and of the passion for the poor that was shown by Jesus crucified. This implies a change, a shift and an ascent, which is not merely geographical – though that may be part of it – but also paschal.

3.4 The demand of Creation. Respect for life and the ecology.

Proponents of the neo-liberal globalizing system have created a new definition of human beings. Now we are defined as *homo economicus*. At one stroke they have done away with other definitions of man, whereby he was a creator of myths, a giver of meaning, a being who sings, prays and plays.

Homo economicus is the human being as power-full, scheming how to exploit the natural resources that are deemed to be totally at our disposal. “If the sole target of the free world economy today is the increase of capital, and if at the same time the term *free* is taken to mean that the real needs of human beings and the preservation of the planet are irrelevant to the economy, then our current situation is logically unsustainable” [Dorothee Soelle: *Towards an Eco-Feminist Spirituality*]. Creation’s demand to be respected suggests the need for each human being to be changed towards a new culture. This is not so much the cultivation of learning as of wisdom – which is not the same thing. The intrinsic value of such a wisdom does not arise from norms but from a capacity for reverence towards created things, by which they are allowed to express their own selves; and this changes the subject-object relationship which is typical of the experimental sciences. In a word, it depends on the ability to bow down and listen to what the Spirit is expressing through the totality of life – as He has been doing from the first moment of creation when “the Spirit of God hovered over the empty waste”.

Without a breath of this wisdom, there is something destructive in science. An arrogant, imperious way of regarding things and their uses is damaging both to the object and to the subject. We need to grow into a new and different way of inter-relating with nature.

This new wisdom implies the cultivation of new set of attitudes, a great new cultural dynamism which must be set in motion. At this point I would underline two that seem especially significant: the inter-dependency of life, and the overcoming of self-sufficient individualism. In order to enable and conserve life, we need to grow more aware of the mutual dependency that links all things. Women see this mutual dependency as a model contrasting with the western, masculine culture of command. It is a question of another kind of anthropology, learning to live in another way, where in a spirit of reciprocity the value and the presence of all will be respected. We need to develop an anthropology and spirituality of reconciliation with what is other, where nothing is suppressed as useless or insignificant, because the basic attitude is one of inclusion.

The Gospel memory of the meals in which Jesus took part and his preference for inclusive table-fellowship can be a magnificent model for this vital new attitude, which will give historical and cultural expression to the meaning of the Kingdom of God.

The second cultural attitude that can characterize new life-paths involves setting aside all self-sufficient individualism. Only in a harmony of interdependent beings can we live and realize what personhood really means. In this new kind of philosophy and anthropology the human person would be defined as a being in relationship, a subject who is by nature communitarian.

Various authors have shown how widespread in current culture is the idea of the human person liberated from religion, free of any obligation regarding the protection and company of others, thereby becoming cynical, tired, disillusioned, having reduced his principal life-goal to that of simple individual commodity. In its most sophisticated esthetic form, he plunges into a desire-free unhappiness [Handke].

According to St. Paul, the crucified Messiah is the revelation of God who reconciles all human beings. In this crucified Messiah a new form of people is born, a new creation marked by a communitarian subjectivity which overcomes all political, social and gender divisions. “all who are baptized into Christ have been clothed in him. There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female – for you are all one in Jesus, the Messiah” [Gal 3,27-28].

In the light of this, the congregation needs a new culture, a new *forma mentis*, a new way of relating. To a great extent the very future of the congregation will depend on its ability to create interdependent contexts between communities, provinces and regions with the socio-cultural

surroundings where we have a presence. There are countless possibilities for expressing life in this new form. A communitarian Passionist culture, arising from the reconciliation of opposites operative in the crucified Messiah, is a debt we owe and which we must try to pay, by laying the foundations and pillars which will make it possible, viable and operative. The major challenge facing us is to pass from a life of community to a community of life!

It is by now clear that this new *sapientia vitae* is closely related to the *sapientia crucis*. They are not identical, since the wisdom of the cross connotes an explicit confession of christological faith while the wisdom of life can be sincerely practiced even by non-believers. Still, a genuine wisdom of the cross offers an ample basis for the wisdom-of-life we have referred to; and this in turn produces a dynamism which flows back into the wisdom of the cross.

4. To die a little in order to be born a little. A Passionist congregation in process of re-birth.

The life-encountering challenge facing our congregation at the start of this new millennium finds a most important grounding in the Johannine writings. “There are many other signs that Jesus did which are not written in this book. These have been written in order that you may believe, and believing, have life in his name” [Jn 20,30-31].

After the prophetic action performed by Jesus in the Jerusalem temple, Nicodemus who had been present confirms that such actions are typical of a prophet – through whom God gives signs of his presence and of some new path by which people are called to walk. When he came to Jesus by night, the key question guiding their discussion was, “Since you have shown that you act on God’s behalf, what is now required of us? What should we do?”. Jesus lays out clearly what God now wants of us, “Unless one is born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God”, and then, in a parallel expression, “I tell you solemnly, unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” [Jn 3,3.5].

Jesus came not simply to propose reforms to a highly complicated religious system – since it had become obsolete and was no longer able to manifest the presence of God to his people and allow the people access to their God. He met with a system of religion that was outworn not merely by age, but because it had lost the capacity to make room for the novelty of God’s action. “God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” [Jn 3,16].

This is God’s ultimate and definitive gift and Jesus elevates it as the guiding principle of his own actions, the key to understanding all his activity and the guide to what belongs to the future and what is now obsolete.

An urgent task of the general chapter, and subsequently of the congregation, is to see clearly the criteria which can guide us in discerning what aspects of Passionist life past and present are no longer valid, and what new ways we must create. This is the fundamental secret that will enable us to realize this “die a little in order to live a little more”, as we link our present to our past and project forward into the future – a future full of life.

This is not the first time that the people of the bible has been faced with a great and serious call to rebirth and renewal. Indeed there was hardly a time in Israel’s history and tradition when they were not challenged to adapt to the sheer newness of Yahweh’s activity in their midst. At all such moments, the fundamental reality was the boundless fidelity of God – and their absolute trust that He, the lord of history, knows by what paths the life of his people can be renewed.

We can note in passing the set of life-cycles bound up with the number seven: the Sabbath, the sabbatical year and the jubilee year. Nor should we forget how the book of Deuteronomy prescribes that the Torah must be read in its entirety every seven years, in order that the whole people may learn and preserve their identity through all the discontinuities of history.

Therefore we may draw joy and confidence from the prophet Isaiah’s startling references to the newness of God’s action in history, such as: “I am the Lord; that is my name. I do not yield my glory to another, nor my honor to idols. The old has passed away; the new has come. Before it comes to pass, I tell it to you” [Is 42,8-9; cf Is 46,10]; and, more extensively in this great vision: “the former troubles are forgotten and are hid from my eyes. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall

eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord." [Is 65,16b-25].

We are not holding this general chapter in the geographic center of the church's jubilee celebrations; and yet, perhaps this very displacement of our meeting into another culture in another land can serve as a living symbol of where our congregation ought to situate itself – namely, at the margins, on the frontier, in the desert – in order to perceive that new thing which God announces and thereby be renewed in the prophetic aspect of our Passionist charism.

It is important not only to be listening to the Word of God which proclaims this new thing, but also to know from where one is listening, and where one might be enabled to perceive with greater clarity that which God holds in his hands for this millennium and for our congregation.

We are not the first, nor shall we be the last, to attempt this renewal of life. In other contexts of reflection people are talking about the same imperative to measure up to the reality around us. We hear of the need to renew the life of the church, of church institutions, ways of behavior of church personnel in the fields of decision making and of the animation of local christian communities – in a word, the quest to renew the entire face of the church. This must be undertaken too, in conjunction with other churches and religious groupings, confronted as we are by the ever-growing influence of globalization.

People speak with urgency about a crisis of politics at the global level, and of the need for a renewal of political life. Everyone must be aware that the separation of politics from ethics has not only led to massive corruption in the political leaders of many lands, both north and south, but also fostered a sense of disillusionment among ordinary citizens and especially the younger generation. On the other side, one must be critical of the exaggerated submissiveness of politics in face of the economic forces of the free market. Many countries are no longer able to take important and necessary decisions in favor of their own people because they are so fettered by decisions that are taken elsewhere, in other centers of economic and financial power.

There are other aspects of human life struggling with various kinds of crisis: the crisis of the production of culture and the tension between global and local culture. This indeed touches our reality as a congregation which is multi-cultural, and which strives both to be faithful to its tradition while at the same time inculturating our charism in so many different cultural settings. The way we meet this challenge of inculturation in the midst of a changing global cultural paradigm will be very significant for our future. We need to look carefully and honestly at our institutions and our forms of government, in order to find the best way to insert our Passionist charism within the surrounding culture.

Returning to Johannine theology in order to bring our reflections to a close, we must recognize that new life does not arise simply or by magic; it requires the paschal reality of passing from death to life. Refining this a little further, I’d say we must get involved in listening to the Word of Life, sharing the Bread of Life, taking our share in conflicts and in death in order to pass over into life, allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of Life and live in loving fraternal community like the Vine and the branches. This more or less summarizes the life-ideal of the Johannine communities and their communal experience after being expelled from the synagogue, when they had to rethink their proper identity under the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

At the present time, various religious groups and theological circles in different countries are speaking with increasing urgency about the theme of *re-founding* religious life. The category of re-foundation does not imply that a new religious life must be invented, but rather that the process of renewal of religious life begun at the Vatican Council must be deepened, in the light of the change of epoch and of cultural paradigm through which we are living.

“Re-foundation – this challenge which faces every single religious in the institute – means going back to the foundational experience, situating ourselves within the movement of the Spirit that impelled our founders and set them on their way, not knowing where the road would bring them. It means returning to the original experience of God and of following Jesus that stood at the beginning of religious life” (Jose M. Guerrero, *Para Vino Nuevo, Odres nuevos. La refundación como expresión de fidelidad creativa*. Testimonio n. 173, mayo-junio 1999, pp. 33-45).

It would be well worth while to listen to the voice of other brothers and sisters who are equally engaged in the charismatic adventure, since they can help us discover the signs of the times by which the Spirit of God is leading us. Likewise we should provide them with whatever help we can, in dialog about ways and means of renewing religious life.

What is certain is that whatever renewal of our Passionist religious life we plan will be real and valid only if we are disposed to undertake it with some objective criteria, listening to other voices and joining our efforts with theirs, sharing a broad spectrum of perspectives through the practice of open and respectful dialog.

I believe that the hope of previous generations of Passionists charges this general chapter with a serious responsibility. If we are unable to renew and recreate Passionist life so as to give it meaningful form in this present time, the hopes of those who preceded us will be unfulfilled. Our sense of brotherhood embraces not only the present and the future of new generations, but must also

faithfully respect the great ideals for which our former brethren were prepared to dedicate their lives.

5. Conclusion

To pass over from death to life is the principal form of following Jesus today. To follow him is an event that is personal, communitarian and paschal. Easter happens even in the midst of mortal realities, and where grave offences against life are committed. Easter proclaims that life is greater than death; it is a believing hope that neither death nor evil nor any of the things that diminish man, will have the last word.

I imagine that in this general chapter we are prepared to walk this paschal path once again. In order to understand what life is, we need to take our reference point from Jesus Christ crucified and risen. From there we discover what it is to have a passion for life; of ourselves we are incapable of seeing life in its true dimensions. The passion for life is felt and expressed in a dynamic communion with Jesus, and through him with our Father. As St. Paul says, those who let themselves be led by the Spirit of God are children of God. And “if we are sons, we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ – provided we share in his passion we will share in his glory” [Rom 8,17].

We are ready for the Father to dwell within us, and so we can share in the joy announced by the prophetic author of the Apocalypse: “behold the dwelling of God among the people. He will wipe all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death nor grief nor weeping. The old has passed away; the new has come. He who is seated on the throne says: I am making all things new” [Rev 21,3-5].



A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE IN LATIN AMERICA

*Fr. Carlos Palácio, S.J.**

Introduction

Clarifying the *three elements* of the title:

- I. A perspective on *life*, but “what is life”?
- II. Taking the point of view of *Latin America*; which is not meant as simply one other point of view among many, but as a universally inclusive perspective.
- III. A *theological* perspective, i.e., not an lesson or explanation (of some biblical point), but rather a means of communicating the Good News in such a way that it will resonate within the meaning of life held by contemporary society (which is characterized by anxiety, longing, barriers, etc.)

I. STARTING POINT: WHAT IS LIFE?

1. Is it a univocal concept?

What does a person mean by “life”?

Underlying elements: *a physio-chemical organic equilibrium*; but life is not reducible to these elements; life is something “more”.

Life is not brought about by *talking about life* (for example, when the World Health Organization instructs on health issues; or when a philosophical-cultural circle gathers for a discussion).

Here LIFE is meant as *the fundamental and primary value*. Any person has an immediate perception of it (direct, ingenuous, innocent?); it is a value which includes everything and to which everything is reducible. Cf., Gonzaguinha: “always desired, although sometimes mistaken”; “no one wishes to die”, etc.

2. An existential approach: The experience of “living” as:

a) *A unique and indivisible experience* (ambiguity of “opposites”: material and spiritual; body and soul; mortal life, eternal life; etc.). Human life is a unity.

b) The experience of life as a *totality*; e.g., the relationship with cosmos-nature; social relationships, open to transcendence. These are dimensions that are inseparable from life. “To care for life” supposes taking all of these dimensions into consideration.

c) An *act of faith*; “betting on” its meaningfulness (against all of its non-sensical elements). Blind faith. Even when someone denies its meaningfulness, he’s “betting on” being right. An act of faith which means to abandon oneself to the “mystery”; and to make choices which protect the “mystery of life”.

3. Life is always “somewhere”

Whether a “formal topic” or an “immediate perception”, life is always dependent on a given point of view, on a social context, on the presence (or absence) of conditions considered indispensable for life.

II LIFE IN THE LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

Latin America is not simply a “point of view” which conditions and sets limits. It is a “*perspective*” which:

a) conditions what you see (e.g., to see Rio de Janeiro from the favela or from the southern sector; or Jesus in the temple at the “Treasury gate” [Mark 12,41-44; Luke 21,1-4]);

b) opens to the totality, not just to one point;

c) permits one to see in “another way”.

What does one see when starting from this perspective?

1. Characteristics of life in Latin America

Paradoxical contrasts; e.g., those who “live less” or “live badly” are those who have the greatest hope and joy in life. How does one explain this?

a) *Affirmation of life* (will, joy to live):

- biological life: growth, birth rate (consequences of control); youth (especially Europe);

- human life: joy, feasts, ability to be reborn.

b) *Life threatened*:

- biologically: one dies before one's time (hunger, sickness, abandonment)
- economically: lack of minimal conditions (inequality, poverty, structural injustice, etc)
- socially: exclusion of more than two-thirds who find themselves "outside"
- politically: decisions imposed by others (e.g., external debt)

2. The abstract nature of the understanding of "life" in the dominant culture.

a) A *false neutrality*: the concept of life is "dual" (like economy and society; two speeds; developed and underdeveloped; rich and poor).

- there are those who have a normal lifespan and others who die prematurely

- there are those who have enough to live on, and those who struggle to survive.

Therefore, what does it mean "to live"? What does it mean to say that life is an absolute value? What is quality of life as an absolute demand? Life and quality of life, are they not human and ethical concepts. There are different classes: of life, of illness, of care, of death.

b) It is a *contradictory concept*; never have there been so many possibilities for life (science, technology, wealth, etc.), and never has life been in such an endangered state (e.g., nuclear destruction, environmental destruction, wars, etc.).

Contemporary culture oscillates between:

- the exaltation of life (acknowledging its value, treasuring it, respecting it, defending it, dignity of life);

- and its "destruction" (irrational violence, aggressivity of every kind, terrorism, etc.).

Why? There are political, ideological, and economic *dimensions* which become *absolute goals*. Or, in other words, *the end* at any price becomes the supreme law. As a result, idols are created to which victims are being sacrificed.

c) It is an “**abstract**” **concept**; what is discussed about life prescind from the concrete reality, real life. For example:

- one thinks and theorizes about life but never takes into account the victims produced by the system;
- the “quality of life” or “well-being” is defended, without taking into account the excluded;
- the economies of production and consumption are insensitive to their destructive consequences (environment, resources).

CONCLUSION: from both the human and the theological points of view, it is necessary to recover: *the unity of life* (material, cultural, and spiritual constitute one reality; the “present life” is inseparable from “eternal life”); and *the totality of life* (the ecological question cannot be separated from the social questions nor from the religious dimensions of the human being). In this “recovered synthesis” the solution for many of the contradictions of today will be found.

3. Results: a conception of life that is unbalanced; that tries to maximize the “conditions for life”, while progressively diluting the “sense of life” (reasons for living).

a) *A life which is devalued and lessened*; “cultural suicide” and “pathological society”:

- The pathology of “abundance”: ease, self-indulgence of every kind, comforts, etc.
- Consumption without measure: man as a being with many needs.
- Deterioration of the person: physically and mentally; alienation, depression, etc. The human being who comes forth is *isolated* (individualism, homeless, without a “common world”); *self-centered* (occasional outreach to someone he can consider his equal, someone from my group, etc.) and *heartless* (insensitivity to those who suffering and to injustice).

b) *A life without a history* (and therefore, without a future). *Carpe diem!*

The question of the lack of meaning: there are no horizons (the context of life should have a beginning and an end; but this kind of life has no origin and no goal).

What will we transmit to the new generations? There is no life-project, no plan for a society. Without these, how will we build-up life?

Cf., O. Mondragón: the biblical theme of “from generation to generation”. History as the life process from the promise-blessing, to the fulfillment; based on the realization that what now exists is not yet that which God dreamed.

c) *A life which is dehumanized.*

A style of life which kills (environment, pollution, auto accidents, stress, drugs, food supply, noise, lack of exercise, etc.).

On the other hand: exaltation of health and of the body; cult of appearances. Human life is reduced to that which it has in common with other beings (biological sense). There is *no humanizing will*; a desire to create conditions for life (a healthy life also means: mental health; affectivity, communion and inter-relationship with others and with God, an interior life, etc.).

CONCLUSION: what might “globalization of life” mean? For all human beings, life ought to be holistic, which means not only wholly “natural”, but should include its social and transcendent aspects as well.

III FOR A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

This does not mean a “presentation about”, but “good news”, which resolves our paralyzing anxiety.

1. The perspective: “in Jesus” (starting point is Jesus)

A “causal” reading of the origins (cf., Israel, Genesis) ought to have Jesus Christ as its starting point. This is the meaning of the NT expression, “created in Jesus Christ”.

a) This is about a *conviction of faith* that pervades the NT, i.e., (eternal) life is manifested in Jesus (cf., 1Jn 1,1). “God has made us the gift of eternal life and this life is in his Son” (1Jn 5,11-13), He is the Logos of life, the word for life, the light of life, etc., (cf. Prologue of the Gospel of John).

John synthesizes this in the beautiful phrase: “I have come so that all might have life and have it in abundance” (John 10,10).

Life is resplendent through the Gospel, the good news which is Jesus (2 Tim 1,10).

b) The *re-reading* done by the Christian community:

- In Jesus (in his life, death and resurrection), a human life was carried to its fullness, to the limits of the possible, and of impossibility.

- God thought of us and always dreamed that the human being would be “like Jesus”. This is what the affirmation “created in Christ before the creation of the world” means (in other words, from all time, for all time).

- For this reason human life is “more”, it contains in itself an “excess” which points to a fullness (goal), which is the same as its origins (life in God flowing into us). This means that life, our life, is eternal.

2. **Life**, that which the *human being* is, is not revealed in Adam, but in Jesus Risen. In fact, it is in the Risen One (who lived and died) that we discover the fundamental dimensions of life.

What are these fundamental dimensions which make possible life’s becoming “good news” and thus able to “evangelize” the concept of life held today?

IV LIFE’S DIMENSIONS WITH JESUS AS THE STARTING POINT

1. The “mystery of life”, i.e., life as a “gift”.

In response to a stunted life, one which has lost its enchantment, which finds no meaning, that dimension of life “as a mystery” must be recovered. We must come to appreciate life as a reality which we cannot entirely grasp (it fascinates us, but at the same time, it is always beyond our grasp).

a) *How does this dimension appear in Jesus?*

In his experience of “Abba” and in his resurrection, Jesus is not the frame of reference. He comes from God and exists for God. Jesus has the experience of life as a gift (God who gives himself and who communicates himself out of love). The origin, the fount of life, is the love of God which is diffusive of itself. For this reason, Jesus feels himself rooted, his life *has roots*, i.e., has a foundation. It is driven by neither necessity nor chance. His life is the fruit of the love which precedes him. Jesus can accept this gift because he feels himself accepted. His supreme gesture is to abandon himself to death in the certainty that he will not fall into a void.

b) How does one evangelize contemporary life?

It is not enough to be aware of the “limits” of life (beginning and end). Life has an origin and a goal which are altogether another thing from having a beginning and an end. Life is not reducible to purely biological limits.

To have an “origin” means that life does not come from me, nor does it begin with me. However, to have an “origin” means more than anything else that everyone of us exists as a being who has been preceded, because Someone thought of me with love and gives himself to me. “Amor, ergo sum”; because I am loved, I exist. Life is thrust through with love; God permeates our selves. To be created is to be molded in this creative relationship.

Because of this origin, life has a goal. Life is more than pure “existence”. It reflects a fullness which goes beyond the limits of “existence”, beyond the terminus of death. Fundamentally, life is a communion. This “communion with life, which is God”, this fullness, can be experienced and lived in the midst of difficulties, poverty, sufferings, and all of the unpleasant things of life. Death is the ex-communion, the being placed at the margins, beyond this relationship of love.

Because life has a goal, it has a future. This is the “excess”, the “more” that shines through in so many ways because of the human obstinacy to believe that life is stronger than death, because of this “strange way of having faith in life”.

A human being thus rooted in this defining relationship is a “responding” being. He has the responsibility of “caring for life”. It may be that many contradictions of modern man (isolation, anguish, depression, oppression, etc.) are due to ignoring this defining relationship. Without relationships and community, the human being is reduced to a “being with needs”. Therefore, a being without meaning.

2. “To care for life”, i.e., life as a duty.

It is undeniable that human life is the center, evolution speaks to this. But this does not mean that man ought to be the destroyer of nature. He is “shepherd” of creation and responsible for his brother (Gen 4, 9-10). Being the center does not mean that everything is for one’s own sake. Man is for more; he is completed in God.

a) How does this dimension appear in Jesus?

◆ ***THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COMMITTED TO LIFE.***

Jesus lived his life doing good (*Acts 10:38*). He is the word of life (*1John 1:1*).

The proclaiming of the Kingdom of God is inseparable from the “signs” which show the Kingdom in action. This is the significance of the “healings” and miracles; that others may receive the gift of life (“that they may have life”). The life they receive is individual and social, it is physical, and it is a healing to their very roots (*Mk 2:5*). To cure, to forgive, etc., is to fight against sufferings and against all those things which diminish and threaten life (that which divides, the *dia-bolico*).

This battle waged by Jesus always begins with the little ones, the excluded; it appears where life is most threatened. Cf., the “signs” of the Kingdom of God: blind, lame, lepers, deaf persons. And (surprise!): the dead and the poor (*Mt 11:2-6*). The life of Jesus (in word and action) is *sim-bolic*, it unites, it includes. Only by admitting into life and communion (cf. the participation-communion at table) all those who are outside, who do not count, who are not valued, can God’s will be achieved: life for all. God will rest only when all has been fulfilled. The significance of the Sabbath is that life has been completed. In this perspective the words of Jesus have an incredible force: “today, today this scripture is fulfilled this scripture for you!” (*Lk 4:21*)

◆ *THE DEATH OF JESUS AS “ULTIMATE SERVICE” FOR LIFE*

Death cannot be separated from *life*: motivations, meaning, cause, etc.

Jesus loved life profoundly: his gestures, words, parables, etc., show that he lived life intensely, with realism, without naiveté but with hope; hope in the Father and hope in people. He devoted himself to others; he knew how to rest, rejoice and cry, he enjoyed feasts and withdrew into solitude. Life is more than “things” (although they may be necessary). In Jesus there appears no suffering which comes from egoism, from the attachment to things, from resentment, from a hollow interior.

But *Jesus is not closed in on himself*, or on the joys which life could have given him. In two ways *Jesus opens himself to the sufferings of others*. 1) letting them come to him, suffering with them, suffering the consequences; and 2) fighting strenuously to eliminate the suffering; using every means possible to eliminate the evils which can be avoided (egoism, injustice, lack of solidarity, etc.) and making efforts to relieve the unavoidable and inevitable sufferings (sickness, age, death).

Thus, the death of Jesus is a life given to give life. From this it appears clearly that life is a gift. Jesus gives his life so that we may take it and give it to

others. This is why he says that there is no greater love than to give one's life. Love is stronger than death.

b) How does one “evangelize” in this dimension?

By accepting responsibility for life as meaning responsibility for the other:

- by a concern for the totality: the world; the humblest; and creation's transcendence;

- by making the necessary decisions and sacrifices that allow our “choices” to be real options for life;

- by beginning with the humblest: was this not the meaning of Gandhi's words, “we will walk at the pace of the slowest?”;

- by truly showing that life is an absolute value for all. As a matter of fact, there are lives which “count for more” than others (the handicapped, old, poor, etc.); why is this so?;

- by witnessing against hedonism; pain (especially of others and for others) ought to be integrated in life. Every life involves struggles, self-denials, sacrifices.

3. The “paschal” nature of life (to lose life in order to gain it).

a) How does this dimension appear in Jesus?

◆ What does the gospel paradox of “losing in order to gain” reveal? Simply that there are “false ways” of living and of fulfilling oneself. This is something which always is a scandal for mankind (to seek fulfillment only for one's own sake).

◆ The life of Jesus as “living parable”: he is the grain of wheat which falls into the ground, dies and disappears in order to make possible another life, different, new.

◆ This experience essentially means an absolute abandonment to the Father (even the abandonment of death); and to be in solidarity with all who suffer, with the crucified.

b) How to evangelize this dimension?

◆ The scandal of losing oneself: (cf., modernity).

44th General Chapter

◆ Life can deteriorate:

- not only physically (illness, aging, death);
- not only for external conditions;
- but in the measure in which the “evil” exhausts us and dehumanizes (cf., that which Paul says about sin, Rm 6:23, the principle of antiresurrection).

◆ To live as a resurrected being: that is, risen to new life and bringing about the rising of others (giving rise to life), through the Holy Spirit who is the Lord and giver of life.

◆ *“To live in the Spirit and according to the Spirit means to recognize that things and situations are not yet that which ought to be. Therefore, ‘to live according to the Spirit’ is to go down the avenues of ‘creation of the impossible’.”* (O. Mondragón).



**A VIEW ON THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN LATIN AMERICA, AT THE
TURN OF THE CENTURY. JOURNEYS AND CHANGES**

Fr. Edênio Valle, S.V.D.

Introduction

1. AT AN HISTORICAL CROSSROAD

In these past number of years it has become customary to regard Religious Life in Latin America as being at an historic cross-road. This colorful metaphor points to something very real - particularly for people of my age and generation who have lived through the turbulence of the post-Conciliar years, the encouraging new vision introduced at Medellin and the creative effervescence of the Religious Life in the decades of the 70's and 80's. At that time there was great enthusiasm and, it seemed, a clearer sense of conviction about our goals. Despite the widespread vocational crisis, the Religious Life vision of the dream of a renewed church seemed closer at hand. Difficult years followed, described as "winter", "return to the great discipline", "exaltation of subjectivity", "loss of prophetism " etc. Regardless of our way of thinking and judging about this past, one thing is clear: we really do stand at a cross-road! Still, one must use the metaphor of "cross-road" with a certain caution, and not lose sight of the pathway already travelled and not to obscure the basic problem, which is that of finding a "*new historic form*" for the Religious Life in Latin America.

2. Carlos Palácio is one of the theologians of Religious Life in Latin America who has best presented this question, in its theological depth. According to him¹ at the start of the 80's, the major obstacle to defining Religious Life was that of its *self-definition*. It was the very concept of Religious Life , not as an essence but in its concreteness, its shape and boundaries that were not well defined. This lack of clarity gave rise to clashes, resistances and value changes. The greatest difficulty was in determining what sense and meaning should be given to charism, which was being re-read from differing and sometimes contrary starting points. Efforts to affirm and expand Religious Life were without result. Religious Life was therefore tempted to turn in upon itself, unable to let itself be questioned by whatever came from "outside", from that world which ought to be a reference point for defining its identity "*ad intra*". This basic dilemma must be seen both theologically and historically. Here I will attempt a more historical reading; toward the end I will

¹ Palácio, Carlos, "Present and future of the Religious Life in Brazil", : *Convergência*, 1979, p. 213 ff.

touch a little on the theological dimension, as it has been expounded by C. Palácio².

3. Let me begin by stating three personal convictions:

- As we stand at a cross-roads, we need an attitude of humble and patient search, in order to discern and re-contextualise the options and practices that were adopted at other times, since these are constantly called in question by changes that are always occurring. This is a basic condition for living that "creative fidelity" about which the document *Vita Consecrata* speaks.

- In this process of highs and lows, what is at stake is more than this or that element, taken in isolation. It is a matter of reviewing the project in its totality, of re-founding the Religious Life, as is said in various countries today, including our own. The present face of Religious Life convinces few and is incapable of explaining to the world, the church and to Religious Life themselves, all of the charismatic and apostolic richness that belongs to it.

- With J. Comblin³, I fear that the church and even the leaders of Religious Life have adapted and “*focus on questions of means, without giving first priority to the purpose*”.

4. THE TOPICS I PROPOSE TO TREAT:

- A. Journeys and cross-roads of the Religious Life in Latin America.
- B. Life as the completion of liberation.
- C. Changes and problems that mark the process today.
- D. The Utopia of a Religious Life, centred upon Life.

A. Journeys and cross-roads traversed, on an arduous road

I am unable to describe here the whole pathway traced by the church and by Religious Life in Latin America. I focus mainly on the reality of Brazil, the country I know best, but seeking to follow an approach that may apply to the majority of other Latin countries, including the Caribbean. We all know that there is not, and never has been "one" Latin America. In reality it is neither *Latin* nor

² Cf., Palácio, Carlos, “O sacrificio de Isaac: uma parabola da Vida Religiosa,” in *Convergência*, 1992, No. 123, p. 359 - 376.

³ Comblin, J., “Interpelações à Vida religiosa,” in: *Convergência*, 1993, p. 264.

one. It is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, the fruit of an uneven historic process which I cannot attempt to outline here⁴. It is clear that links of convergence between different stories in a pathway that has many common points. Puebla speaks, maybe too optimistically, of a "Catholic substrate" common to all of Latin America.

When one looks at Religious Life, perhaps one may even say the same thing, especially for the last decades of the twentieth century. In these years, with the satellitization of all our countries around the North American colossus, social, political, economic, cultural and religious life (because of the expansion of protestant and/or esoteric groups that are swamping the whole of Latin America) have taken on a somewhat unitary aspect. An essentially similar basic cultural climate has arisen in all of our countries. The action of Church bodies like CELAM [Latin American Bishops' Conference], CLAR [Latin American Conference of Religious] and national conferences of bishops and religious have also been a factor linking the internal and external dynamic of your Religious Life.

For me, the most fundamental aspect in this process of radically reviewing Religious Life has been the rediscovery made in *Religious Life* of the originality of its historic formation both relating to persons and their cultures. These are no longer seen as being at the "centre"; we see them rather as they were before, namely, at the "periphery". In cutting the link with the centres of power which traditionally limited them in their vitality and self awareness, the Church and *Religious Life* will be better able to grasp the role historically exercised by them in this continent of "laid open veins". In no way am I saying that *Religious Life* has already crossed over to the social and cultural place of the "other" Latin America, which was earlier ignored or denied. What I want to say is that it can no longer think of itself without accepting its solidarity with the destiny of the world of the poor and the excluded (who paradoxically are almost two-thirds of the population).

The problem of *Religious Life* today, in my view, consists in knowing how to carry forward this distancing of itself from the social place it occupied during the first half of the twentieth century. What is important at this moment of transition is to know how to reaffirm the basic options of the post-Medellin period, shaping them in the light of the needs and conditions of the new *signs of the times* which mark a history that does not cease to march on. Of course, this integration of the recent past and what is newly emerging in history cannot ignore the sometimes tumultuous happenings of the 70's and 80's. Still less can it dispense with its basic references to the following of Jesus, the Gospel of the Cross and Resurrection and

⁴ Cf., the two volumes of the work [by various auth] by CEHILA: *História geral da Igreja na America Latina*, Vozes/Paulinas, Petrópolis/São Paulo, 1983. On the Religious Life in Brazil in these past 500 years of our history, an overview can be found in: Valle, Edênio, *O seculo XX interpela a VR brasileira. Guia para uma reflexão histórica*, Aparecida, Editora Santuário, 1999.

the living charism of each congregation. What history requires of the *Religious Life* is that it be present in the definite, concrete "now," as witness and agent of a prophetic transformation of the world, in the perspective of the kingdom.

1) *Highlights of the Journey*

Let me begin by briefly outlining the process of decentralization to which I have referred. Its milestones can be summarized under three terms all vitally important for the present cross-road: Liberation-Insertion-Enculturation. To these three I might add spirituality and the prayerful reading of the Bible. These are densely-packed concepts that would merit more detailed consideration than our time allows here. We will go directly to describing the route taken by Religious Life on this continent.

Perhaps it will be useful to recall for those who come from non-catholic and non-Latin countries that, in our continent, the Church and *Religious Life* have always played a very important role in our history's development.. the Portuguese and Spanish colonial system bound the state tightly to the Church and vice versa. The actions of Jesuits, Dominicans, Benedictines, Augustinians, Mercedarians, etc., were tied in with our country's history. With the wars of independence, and at a later stage, the introduction of a republican liberal regime, there came changes, misunderstandings and persecutions, but in general, the influence of the *Religious Life* actually increased. The older orders, expelled or repressed after the persecution of the Jesuits around 1759, and the new congregations, both male and female [a novelty!] began to be felt as the main agents of reform in the Church in Latin America and in Brazil . All this development of the 19th century spilled over into the *Religious Life*. I pass quickly over this chapter of our history - which stretches to Vatican II - in order to stay within my allotted time. All that follows relates mainly to the post-conciliar period.

Let me make just a few observations about this first phase in which the *Religious Life* in Latin America was "re-founded" by the wholesale transplantation of renewal movements prompted by Vatican I, toward the end of the 19th century. A model of Church and a style of *Religious Life* was planted among us, which originated in "romanized" Catholicism, and made of *Religious Life* one of the main instruments for the renewal of Catholicism on our continent.

In countries like Brazil, Argentina and Chile, the process was closely linked to the entry of millions of immigrants, fleeing from the adverse social conditions in the Europe of that time. In those countries, the new model of *Religious Life*, very different from that already known in Latin America during the colonial and independence eras, fitted in very well. RELIGIOUS LIFE, which had been in death throes in the mid 19th century, took on new life and in a few decades was

reinvigorated.⁵ Since the apparatus of the republican states was weak, the Church moved in to fill a supplementary role in responding to the social needs of the population, which had begun to migrate from the country to the cities. So there developed a great network of social works [schools, hospitals, relief of the poor, parishes, seminaries] contribute to greatly strengthen the prestige of the Catholic Church in the first half of the 20th century.

But, from the other side, because of these works, Religious life found itself separated from the popular masses, and took on characteristics and modes of thought that did not sufficiently represent the mentality of the people. Sociologically speaking, *Religious Life* was an integral part of the middle classes, to whom it furnished most of its services, and from whom came most of its vocations. Clearly, this picture differed from country to country and in different economic regions, but I maintain that throughout this whole era, effectively, *Religious Life* made a preferential option for the middle classes. The existence of a great number of foreign vocations especially in the male and clerical congregations, reinforced in the religious houses the attitudes of distance and superiority with respect to lower sectors of the population.

Vatican II introduced a *second phase*, weakening the older model that had seemed so stable and durable. In this phase, it was the hierarchical church which gave the alarm and called upon *Religious Life* to make a profound revision. The polite modifications proposed by *Perfectae Caritatis* were soon swept aside by the process of renewal⁶ unleashed by Vatican II. There was a general reawakening of the *Religious Life* in Europe and in the United States. But while in those areas the process led to what Arbuckle calls the "liberal model", in Latin America the church's journey moved *Religious Life* to come closer to the people, leading finally to a kind of exodus especially of religious sisters - toward the social place that the *Religious Life* had occupied at an earlier phase. The preferential option for the poor drew thousands of religious - especially women to change their points of reference. From the world of the middle classes *Religious Life* crossed over the stand among the poorer classes which included mainly Negroes and Mestizos. Even their way of

⁵ Cf., Valle, Edênio, op cit, p. 57. In Brazil, in 1872, there were only 103 religious in the whole country. Fifty years later, in 1920, there were 6.059, of whom 2.838 were foreigners and 3.218 were local born. This growth was not merely quantitative, it was also qualitative: there was an improved quality of formation, spirituality, and evangelizing presence as well as comunitarian living together. It seems clear that this expansion happened mainly among the middle classes, who were then settling in the cities and starting that process of urbanization of a population that up to then had been predominantly rural. Consecrated women, who had not been significantly present up to then, also began to play an important role.

⁶ Cf the principles of renewal proposed in *Perfectae Caritatis* no 2 & 5.

relating to indigenous people changed drastically. The famous assembly at Medellin [1968] was a turning point for a greater political and sociological vision of the presence and role of the church, of *Religious Life* and of Christians in our reality. These were the foundation years for the theology and pastoral practice of liberation. Along with the bishops, and often urged by their dedicated pastoral care of their people, *Religious Life* began a revision of its mission on the continent.

Two synods of bishops that followed the Council, still under Paul VI - one on Justice in the world, the other on evangelization - strengthened the process begun by Vatican II and Medellin. They were times of tension. The *Cold War* was in process and the military assumed dictatorial positions, closing ranks with the interests of the USA and imposing silence on the claims and demands of the people, who tended toward a poorly defined socialism. In some countries there were military and ideological guerrillas. Those were days of repression and persecution of the church and of the *Religious Life*, especially of those most inserted among the people. It was also contentious within the Church. In this controversy, John Paul II, in my view, took a stance in favor of the more conservative side. Internally, *Religious Life* tended more toward the line of transformation and resistance. That which best defines this second phase is the [unspoken] alliance of the *Religious Life* with the lower social classes, expressed in its *solidarity with the poor, with a view to their liberation*. The reasons were to live the *Religious Life "ad extra"*, where they had found the sub-world of the poor. And that was where *Religious Life* succeeded in placing itself. This period was characterized by social activism of an urgent kind, in the conviction that social liberation was just coming over the horizon.

A third phase followed. We are now at the 1980's, a decade of great energy and vitality, tensions and ruptures that were as strong or stronger than in the time immediately after Vatican II. This heroic phase always contained a thread of spirituality, no matter how readily this might be neglected by those who were dazzled by the fascination of politics. The internal hurricane unleashed by the Council (dispute between traditionalists and progressives) began to calm down and in its place the involvement of Religious in the dimension of *political life* came into the foreground. Thousands of Religious lived directly with the "joys and hopes" of the people, in the streets, the poorer quarters, the rural areas. Mission was understood and lived on basis of a real paradox of prophetism and of "insertion". It was not a kind of theorizing by theologians and bishops of broad views and generous hearts. This was the precise period when the triad: Liberation-Insertion-Enculturation was consolidated, with *Preferential Option for the Poor* as its backdrop.

To sum up this period, moving clearly beyond the ecclesiastical horizon of convents and institutional works, Religious Life in its more dynamic and creative aspects:

- shifts towards a sharing of the way of life of the poor;
- shifts towards the Basic Christian Communities and joins in social-pastoral works;
 - small groups from female Religious Communities undertake parish work, are engaged in direct pastoral service; they live in small communities, a life-style quite different from the convent.
 - and for the first time in this century, consecrated women also became present in popular movements and organizations, and collaborated also with the unions and with opposition politicians.

In Rome and in some sectors of CELAM all of this movement⁷ called forth hostile reactions. It was in this cultural cauldron that the greatest tension was felt between CLAR and the leaders of CELAM⁸ who held the more conservative line and counted on the support of Rome. Much energy was wasted in this debate, which also had a theological and Biblical wellspring; and its outcome was to discourage the most involved spokespersons for the *Religious Life*. We should not neglect to mention that in all this period, as in the preceding one, there continued a slow but remorseless stillbirth of *Religious Life* journals and a progressive diminution in the number of vocations⁹.

2) *Transition at the turn of the century*

In this moment we are going through a *fourth phase*. The turn of the century coincides exactly with what I've called the "new turning-point", strongly marked by the typical problems of post modernity. The political scenario within which the Church's action takes place has changed in character since the fall of monarchic

⁷ Clearly this is not a homogeneous movement. Some congregations became little involved in all this openness and searching. As is often the case in the story of Latin American Religious Life, these abrahamic minorities marked out a direction that caused great anxiety to the more passive majority.

⁸ Cf Mesters, Carlos & Valle, Edenio, La lecture de la parole de Dieu à partir des pauvres: "Le projet Parole et Vie", in Berten, Ignace (Org) *Le rendez-vous de Saint Domingue*, Paris, Centurion, 1991, p. 149-177.

⁹ A brief note on the demography of Brazilian VR: in 1970 there were 40.660 professed religious & their number was down to 36.573 in 1996. throughout this period, priest religious declined from 8.052 to 7.631, and the number of religious brothers from 3.290 to 2.851. In 1996 there was a significant numerical growth in male vocations, and a somewhat smaller growth in female vocations, except to the contemplative monasteries, where the growth-rate was stronger.

socialism and the return of representative democracy in all our countries, with the notable exception of Cuba and the atypical cases of Peru and Venezuela. There is a new flowering of male vocations, though there is much debate about their quality. Within women's Religious Life, the vocation problem has its special problems related to the complex question of women's' role in the Church . Among consecrated women, the average age of the group continues to rise. There are new vocations, though in less numbers than in the male congregations, but there is a great instability in the effort to get the situation back to normal.

Without doubt, this final part of the pontificate of John Paul II is highlighting an instability that is perceived not only by those who live in more or less closed ecclesiastical *milieus* of the charismatic kind. In the 90's, the Utopias of the earlier phase had lost their historic terrain. The re-democratization which aroused such hopes in Brazil did not get very far. The country was swamped by a wave of corruption. The modernization of the economy brought with it the neglect of the lower and middle classes generally. There was frightful unemployment, and violence reached new and unimaginable levels, with the growth of organized gangs and of drug-trafficking. The basic claims of the people regarding education, health, housing, work and land, and their desire for participation remained unfulfilled.

Apart from all this, the new economy had choked off the popular movements and smothered the dynamism of the CEB and of the social areas of pastoral work, apart from a few sectors. Apparently, there are no viable alternatives except those of conformism and retreating to the defence of small and immediate interests. It is not easy for the *Religious Life* to maintain, on the one hand the principle of option for the poor and their liberation, and on the other, a critical attention to the new situation, where clearly there are opportunities and possibilities which need to be put into action. I just draw attention to a certain weariness and general downheartedness.

What profile should the *Religious Life* take in the immediate future? This question, which I have treated in a recent book¹⁰, depends on various as yet unresolved questions which I may call "*disputative*". It depends also on what direction will be taken among the four large factors now present in the Church in Latin America. It is hard to say to which of these the *Religious Life* will most adapt itself. Consequently there will be a struggle between the four, which in itself can be seen as a positive thing. For the present all we can do is ask ourselves:

¹⁰ Cf Valle, Edênio, *Que futuro para a Vida religiosa no Brasil?*, Aparecida, Editora Santuario, 1998.

- will there arise from here a profile of a kind that supports the *institutional*¹¹...as is being suggested and implemented by Rome?
- Or will it be of another kind, a *Religious Life* modeled on the enthusiasm of the *Charismatics*, for whom exaltation and subjective piety are the key elements of religiosity?
- Or again, will it flow from a *Testimonial and Kerygmatic* model, one of the few that find acceptance in post-Christian societies like those of modern Europe?
- Or, finally, will the *liberation* model prevail, which will bring the *Religious Life* to identify itself with sufferings of the people, and is thereby a sign of life and of hope?

From what has already been said, one might have the impression that in Brazil and in Latin America everything revolves around whether *Religious Life* is renewed and inserted into our reality. In fact it is not so. Beyond the tendency to rebuild a more closed model, there are many religious men and women dedicated to the so-called "works". These are perhaps the majority. Even so, throughout most of the *Religious Life* there pulses much of the spirit already mentioned, which privileges that "*Abrahamic majority*" (Helder Camara) going out in search, believing in a new heaven and a new earth.

B. "Life", as the completion of "Liberation"

I. The affinity between "praxis" and "attention"

Before entering upon the task, I would like to draw attention of the Passionist capitulars to a fact I regard as significant. Life - the central concern of your 44th general Chapter - is also among the primary concerns of the Church and of *Religious Life* today in Latin America and in Brazil . I would also say that this concern of LIFE, and an ever fuller level of life, has the same two poles that I see in the central theme of this Chapter - "Passion of Jesus Christ, Passion for Life".

In fact, this "passing over" of the Lord and of the world is at the very centre of what we are nowadays living and searching for in the Church in Latin America, filling out the lacuna in our more extroverted, self-confident outlook that characterized our theological vision and practices in the 70's and 80's. To confirm this emphasis it is enough to leaf through the table of contents of the main reviews

¹¹ We support the interesting analysis presented by J.B. Libanio, of the four scenarios found in today's Church: the institutional, the charismatic, the evangelical and the liberationist. Cf., Libanio, J.B., *Cenários da Igreja*, Sao Paulo, Loyola, 2000.

about Religious Life, like *Testimony* from Chile, *Convergência* from Brazil and the *CLAR Review*.

In all of these things I find a greater concentration on the reality of the Suffering Servant, because so great is the impotence that we feel in the present 'exile'. In the most impetuous years of the Theology of Liberation, the terminology and references used were more oriented toward activism and involvement. Some of the common theological terms in popular use today are surprising to those who identify strongly with that other vocabulary of "people power", "base", "self-development", "dependency", "praxis", "bourgeois", "revolution", "class-struggle", "means of production" etc. Here is a short list of terms currently in use¹² - "principle of mercy", "gratuity", "fruitfulness", "attention", "tenderness", "the God of life", "prayerful reading", "caught up in the vision" etc¹³.

In my view, the words of the second list should not be seen as a denial of the earlier words which were used to the point of exhaustion at the time when the hymns and songs of Christian Latin America spoke of "Our Revolutionary Father", emphasizing the need for more radical changes in our system. The other vocabulary - "God is mother, full of tenderness" expresses the perception that the language underlying the first list says nothing to the sensibility of Christians today, beyond the fact of being outmoded by other factors, about which we need not speak here. I think we should see this new language as complementing the analysis I have been giving of the phases of critical and ideological rupture. In this attempt to fill the gap, we find some vital elements of Christian faith at its most essential. Its orientation toward life and its concern for a more interior experience of the God of Jesus Christ, is perhaps manifesting the perplexity of our conscience in the situation of cross-road about which I spoke in my introduction.

We may regard pastoral and ecclesial theology¹⁴, as modes of expressing in a new key the language and concerns of liberation. Even in the authors most

¹² I perceive in the approach of this Passionist Chapter one that is closely parallel to that which I find in the current journey of Religious Life in 1a. It suffices to read the expressions - both verbs and nouns - used in the letter of convocation of this Chapter to render more explicit what is meant by the "*passione di Gesù Cristo come Passione per la vita*". Here is literally the formulation given in the letter: "*to receive* as a gift the many forms of life; to *cultivate* life in community with loving attention; to *assume* the defence of life, just as we see always practiced by Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

¹³ To this list may be added a series of words current in the charismatic movement, where the semantic world is totally removed from matters of political and social concern. These are expressions that I imagine are current throughout the world, full of metaphor and vertically focusing on praise and thanksgiving, towards the Lord.

¹⁴ Cf Gebara, Ivone, *Teologia ecofeminista*, São Paulo, Editora Olho d'Água, 1997; Roy, Ana, *Ser mulher: mística, ética, simbologia, praxe*, São Paulo, Loyola/CRB, 1990.

representative of the engaged theology of the 70's and 80's, we can see some of this sensibility, which dissipated in these post-modern times. To be aware of this new attitude, it suffices to read the titles of the most recent books of some of these authors, such as L. Boff, H. Assmann, Fr. Betto, etc¹⁵.

But in other cases this can explain a religious conformism that cannot cope with the incarnational dimension of the Christian faith. For this reason, it takes refuge in hosannas, which do not confront the full power of sin, nor reveal to the world the scandal of the cross.

II. Hope and life: priorities of the Church in Brazil.

The texts of the *hierarchy* in Latin America reflect the same concern for that which is qualitatively life-giving. This is well seen in Santo Domingo, for example. Almost to the point of giving the impression of wanting to set up a contrast with what our Christian conscience felt in the years now past. The same can be said of the Church of Brazil, whose language is more balanced. The Brazilian episcopal conference has determined in this way its plan of evangelical action for the 4-year period from 1999-2002: *to evangelize Brazilian society through the building of a just and fair society, placing itself fully at the service of life and of hope, in the differing cultures*. Here we see the two aspects formally united in one and the same proposition, since in this theological and pastoral vision, justice and mercy belong together and complement each other.

What is meant by saying "at the service of life and of hope, in the different cultures?" I think something very close to what your Chapter has chosen as the two poles or focal points to guide your reflection about life: life as *gift* and life as *task*. An explanatory text from the Brazilian bishops' Directives¹⁶ says that a just and sharing society can only arise on the basis of a new culture that emphasizes personal dignity and the defence of life.

They regret that "unfortunately, certain aspects of contemporary culture can be called a *culture of death*, by the many ways in which it sacrifices human life to

¹⁵ Briefly, let us note: Boff, Leonardo, *Saber cuidar. Ética do humano - Cuidado pela terra*, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1999; Betto, Frei, *A obra do artista. Uma visão holística do Universo*, São Paulo, Ed. Ática, 1995; Maduro, Otto, *Mapas para a festa. Reflexões Latino-americanas sobre a crise e o conhecimento*, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1994; Assmann, Hugo, *Reencantar a educação. Rumo a sociedade aprendente*, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1998; Vigil, José M., *Aunque es de noche. Latin America "hora espiritual" de America Latina en los 90*, Verbo Divino, Bogotá, 1996.

¹⁶ *Cf Diretrizes Gerais da Ação Pastoral da Igreja no Brasil 1999 - 2002*, Documenti del CNBB, no. 61, São Paulo, Paulinas, 1999.

the idols of wealth, power and pleasure. Life today is being despised and even eliminated, from its conception and in many destructive ways. The God of life demands that it be respected and promoted in all its forms and all its stages"¹⁷.

For the bishops of Brazil the Document of San Domingo illustrates the importance of critically analyzing the signs of death and the seeds of life that are structurally present within our societies and in the daily life of the poor. But the church's testimony in favor of the weak is not just a human virtue but a gift from the God of life. The most important witness to be given by Christians in a society dominated by violence and fear is "to proclaim the paschal hope, the risen Christ victorious over death, and the certain hope of victory and final liberation".

The Church and Religious Life in Latin America also have today a much clearer sense of what their mission requires regarding the various cultures, since in these are expressed in a particular way the dignity, freedom and quality of life within the context and original conditions of each people. The resurgence of oppressed cultures, the valuing of the fundamental rights of persons and groups, effective solidarity between peoples, the cry against any and all forms of injustice, sensitivity to situations of misery, hunger and war, the interest for ecology, attention paid to the globalization of the relationships between peoples, etc¹⁸ - are both aspiration and reality of the human society in which, against the paschal horizon of our faith, we always see seeds of hope and concrete ways for the defense of life.

This is the theological and special locus in which *Religious Life* in Latin America must be "validated" (be "true to itself" and be "effective"), confirming its particular vocation and charism as a prophetic sign of the Kingdom.

III. The Pathways of the new Christian spirituality

There is an interesting general movement - clearly, not involving everybody - happening in culture and in society. I refer to a kind of passing over from a project of individualist and consumerist living, which is summed up in the phrase "*I have*," toward another in which the central reference-point is "*I am*". This movement is seen in the new religious sects and in the wave of orientalism, so prevalent in the self-help literature that is making such fortunes for the publishing houses. With the waking of ecological consciousness, people are re-discerning that we are all part of a greater organism, of a whole that is pulsing and living. For this very reason, we "*ought to do our part to find the pathways toward a more human*,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁸ Juan Pablo II, in "*Redemptoris Missio*" no. 37 lists a series of modern equivalents to the areopagus, where the church's evangelizing and prophetic missions must be carried out.

just and welcoming world. A kind of cosmic solidarity, with a new subjectivity regarding life, which begins in little everyday gestures and which overcomes indifference to the sorrows of others¹⁹". Even small has come to have its own importance; action at local level finds its place within global thinking. There is an abandonment of the linear thinking that was typically socialist in its deterministic voluntarism, in favour of a logic of networking, of interdependency, of diversity of the subjects, and a horizontal plane of cooperation rather than the vertical plane of hierarchical organisation.

What is emerging is a new paradigm. Within it we still find the lure of the sacred, unforeseen by the sociologists of modernity. The ambiguity of this world phenomenon represents for the Church . and for *Religious Life* in a "*new way the difficult task of approaching the captivating message of Jesus²⁰*". Christian spirituality should offer some answers to this thirst for meaning and significance in life - answers that we possess, but are unable to express in an adequate way. This is a lively challenge that faces *Religious Life* in Latin America. The danger is that the necessary deepening of Christian mystical expression may be seen as incompatible with prophetic involvement, and with the changes required in order that all may have life and have it to the full. The effort of synthesis required by the present moment has some lines of force and change that have already been mentioned but which I shall now try to express more fully.

C. Problems and challenges of process at present moment

These challenges and problems are written within the context of a long and extraordinary pontificate, whose general orientation has tended toward conservative positions. We do not know what new emphases and changes the new Pope may (or may not) introduce for the Church of Latin America and the world. In an organization so hierarchical as the Catholic Church, this is a highly significant factor. From it will depend a great part of the orientation which *Religious Life* will take, from early in the next decade.

There are many positive things about the *Religious Life* in Latin America. It would take too long to enumerate all the characteristics that mark, both positive and negative, the pathway traced in the last three or four decades. At the risk of over-simplifying, let me list just a few aspects:

¹⁹ Cf., Dias, Rosinha B., "The joy of following Jesus in the cities. Reflexão sobre VR, cultura urbana moderna e evangelização," in: *Convergência*, 32, 1999, No 308, p. 628.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 628.

I. Problems

- The diversity of cultures is a real fact within *Religious Life*. The vocations that we refer to as “from the people” are pouring into our Houses of Formation and Novitiates. The cycle of dominance almost exclusively by the European style of *Religious Life* seems to be ending, after a millennium of hegemony. Afro- and Indio-American cultures have become a “*must*” for congregations like my own, where more than 50% of our 6000 members were born in the ex-3rd World.

- On the other hand, there is the particular phenomenon of a “shrinking planet” which subjects everything to the patronage of the dominant cultures and their interests and values, but which opens the possibility of a qualitative re-vitalization of human evolution as a whole.

- In a *Religious Life* traditionally guided by men, the *interplay of the genders* represents a challenge that cannot be resolved merely by rhetoric, because it sets deeply in question the practical notions and traditional structures that we still have within *Religious Life*.

- The same can be said regarding *the laity*. In Latin America, their involvement is proclaimed as a fundamental need for the evangelization of this continent. In practice, however, little has been done. On the contrary, one hears of a worsening of clericalism. Even *Religious Life* does not offer very promising conditions to establishing a more adult way of relating, and sharing the charism with the laity. Canon Law, our ingrained habits and structures, plus an inadequate theology of the laity are still blocks to our creativity in this field.

- Another important area in which we are poorly prepared is that of *ecumenism* and the inter-religious dialogue

- There is, finally, the problem, often poorly resolved within *Religious Life*, of the human, sexual and *affective maturity of our members*. In a time of pluralism and individualism, only the ongoing personalization of this vital dimension offers the human basis for mature vocations and for missionary communities capable of a more fruitful entry into the modern Areopagus, which has lost its Christian identity.

II. Changes

The changes that will be mentioned here should not be seen as an “either/or” but as a “both/and”. They are both novelty at the same time as dialectical provocation. They are at once passage and matrix. They have an essentially spiritual dimension which comes from the living spring of our past, but that must offer a response to the quest and desires of our present generation of religious.

A young and promising Brazilian²¹ theologian draws attention to the following changes of viewpoint, life and practice that are already becoming visible among communities and individuals. They are movements arising from a life that accentuates subjectivity, on enjoying things at a pleasant intensity, living in the immediate present. Such changes and emphases need to be discerned in light of the underlying charism and spirituality of our vocation to holiness and mission.

- From a situation of exodus joy and courage and a sense of clarity about our target, we have passed to one of fears and hesitations. We are camped by the banks of the rivers of Babylon, in need of a deep purification of those motivations that sustain our faith and our willingness to invest ourselves in life.

- From the dream of a great liberation, we have passed over into little freedoms that apparently cannot affect the established order, which constrains even our weak efforts and projects.

- From the myth of the revolution that would change the people's destiny from night into day, we have passed over to a painful struggle to gain concessions from those that are lowest in the power-system that controls the world, in a sort of social *kenosis*.

- From an ideological politics we have passed over to cultural politics, through the growing re-discovery of the cultural identity of the coloured races, of women, of the native populations - in a word, of the people. This obliges us to a greater identification with a history, with values and struggles that we should make our own, without however, thinking that we can impose our own ideological or political parameters. What was shouted aloud in the 70's - that "*the poor evangelize us*" - is said today with much more evangelical realism. *This picture unites liberation and enculturation, purifying praxis of all equivocation and rendering possible new initiatives... it stimulates a culture of solidarity and of action for "cidadã" (providing dignity for persons) as a strategy for influence in the organisation of the polis (civil order)*²²;

- From exclusively valuing the *logos* we have passed over to a still preliminary recognition of the "*Eros*"; from the *voluntarism of the instrumental reason* (Habermas) we are moving toward a desire for the "*world of life*", where there is ample space for creativity, for symbol, festival and beauty (Habermas). As Maçaneiro says, in the religious spirituality that is arising at this turn-of-the-century "*Eros becomes the place of the Spirit who educates our desires*

²¹ Maçaneiro, Marcial, "Espiritualidade a novos paradigmas," in: *Convergência*, 32, 1997, no. 304, p.365

²² *Ibid.*, p. 365.

*in the direction of the good and of the truth*²³.

- From a peace conceived as our own conquest, we have passed over to peace as gift, which is given in our interaction and in communion with all that is alive (ecology, holism, mystagogy, solidarity, tenderness, pilgrimage). Justice through the intrinsic power of peace, sown in patience and in hope.

D. The utopia of a *Religious Life* centred on Life

I mentioned at some part of this lecture that it is mainly the women theologians, not the men, who are developing among us the notion of life as a defining element of *Religious Life* in its concrete existence. Checking through the list of contents of the monthly review of the Conference of Religious of Brazil (*Convergência*), I noted how frequent were the references to Life, but how rarely it is developed as a separate topic. When this does happen, it is always a woman who goes into the question at length. It would seem that the driving source of this theology consists in the actual experience of being women and being consecrated who seek to live as a community of disciples, concerned for the passing from this world of death into life. The young Brazilian theologian Ivoni Fritzen²⁴ goes further. She attempts to broaden and systematize a bold phrase by the Korean theologian Chung Hyug Kyung for whom "*in the future, spirituality and theology will move from Christo-centric to Life-centrism*". Fritzen wonders what would a *Life-centred Religious Life* be like, which she outlines as "the human being in our needs, desires and most practical relationships with other people, the struggle and belief, trying to survive - since life is always under threat - in the ambient world and in great sorrow (and subject to the power of death, as death), living without bread and without support, without sharing and in exclusion from everything". These are some of the lines, all touched by an air of feminine tenderness, which are surely lacking in the andro-centric formulations of a theology of *Religious Life* inspired by only a partial view of liberation

- Her concern is for the methods and concrete conditions of a life that is worthy and full, for all the daughters and sons of God, and not for feelings and abstractions. Therefore she does not stay silent in face of the exclusions caused by neo-liberalism, nor will she give in, in face of violence in all its forms of death and neglect of the poor, to which mainline political life today seems indifferent.

²³ Ibid., p. 365.

²⁴ Cf., Fritzen Ivoni, L., "A experiencia religiosa feminina do mistério de deus," em *Convergência*, 29, 1994, no. 277, p. 547. Também: *Deus: és o Tudo. A experiencia religiosa cristã na perspectiva franciscariana*, Tese De Mestrado, PUC-SP, 2000.

- This theology already restores the dignity of the human body, since it is a temple of the Spirit, destined to rise in fullness. In the same line, it defends the body/soul unity in the diversity of races (anti-racism) and the relationship of the sexes (anti-machismo).

- This theology ensures that each subject - woman or man - can relate to others in conditions of full equality, each one with the right of speaking and recognizing each other as partners in building and defending life, as subjects of law both within and outside the church.

- The theology focused upon Life insists that community life is for life and mission, freely and conscientiously chosen in order to generate new life - because life is only life when it is shared.

- It says its word on the basis of the Word of God, heard in the Bible, and in life, that which generates within us the creative freedom of the children of God - and not as a testing and exercise of power.

- The theology based on Life and on behalf of Life embraces and makes its own the great Utopia of justice and freedom that pulses in the heart of history, though it is never fully realized in history.

- It is included in the line of "amorização" (filling with love - and expression from Teilhard de Chardin) which moves all creation in the direction of the Omega point, the goal of an evolution which God planned from the first breath of life, and will reach its fullness in the parousia of the Risen One.

- For this same reason, *Religious Life* centred on "life" is translated into the "mode of being of attentiveness" (L. Boff), and not that of exploration of the nature of creatures.

- Life-centred theology requires in itself an attitude of contemplation-action. Attentive to the signs of the times (John XIII's term) and to the "provocations of the Spirit" (John Paul II) it is intrinsically pneumatic and eschatological; it is "*life according to the Spirit*'.

- It requires a creaturely attitude of adoration and of active expectation.

- It cultivates, in dialogue with all other peoples and cultures, with all religions and philosophies, an ethical and political attitude oriented to the building of a humanity reconciled with nature and the cosmos, and so, more full with the Life of God, hidden and revealed in the mystery of the One and triune God, who made us in his own likeness.

To conclude, in the form of a new "historical image".

I have spoken here more than once about building a new historic form of

Religious Life. This matter came to my mind with special force when I read²⁵ in 1992 an article of rare depth, by Carlos Palácio, one of the best interpreters of *Religious Life* in Brazil . Palácio asks in this text²⁶ what you too are probably asking, namely how can we possibly explain that after so long and so much effort in search of renewal of *Religious Life* in Latin America, it still does not "*present a tidy enough appearance, a sufficiently honest and meaningful face, capable of showing forth its evangelical purpose in an immediate way*" or, why does *Religious Life* not succeed in passing on from the cross-road where it now is (placed there by the spirit ?) why is it unable to renew itself, finally? It is not hard to see the limits of renewal. The basic difficulty is to discover the causes of the impasse.

Now the real cause, according to this Jesuit theologian, is the waning of "this" historical form of *Religious Life* which represents a moment in history and from which it can no longer be disassociated, for reasons both external and internal to *Religious Life* and to the church.

An historical figure in the life of an institution, or indeed, by analogy, in the life of a person, or relating to an event, can exist only in the measure that it has a recognized visibility to others, through a series of signals that configure his identity and render it recognized. But every historical figure has some added external configurative elements. It has a "soul" a content, a unifying principle that gives it meaning. This is a message, and that is why others see it, understand it and respond to it.

The present configuration of *Religious Life* is clearly the result of a certain convergence of historical factors, that have given it body and social plausibility. With the loss of this plausibility, it suffers both the greatness and weaknesses of every figure in decline. it is in a crisis and can no longer answer the appeals of reality; it is as though the spirit were leaving the body. The expressions that made it a carrier of a living message have disappeared. This is exactly the process through which the historical form of *Religious Life* is now passing. It is losing its social visibility and its capacity to attract. It is no longer able to adapt to the church and to society, to render visible the experience of Jesus for the sake of the Kingdom. Up to a short while ago, it succeeded in doing so. But this capacity is worn out, to a large extent. The still dominant model is unable to allow the vital synthesis between "mysticism" and "mission" - the experience of God and the

²⁵ I follow up here something I wrote about in Valle, Edenio, *Que futuro para a Vida Religiosa no Brasil?*, Aparecida, Editora Santuario, s/d, p. 47s.

²⁶ Cf., Palácio, Carlos, "O sacrificio de Israel: uma parabola da vida religiosa," in: *Convergência*, 1992, No. 123, pp. 359-376.

apostolic option - to shine through. It is showing itself incapable of assimilating the "new" which shines out in so many current studies and in the need felt today for a real evangelical transparency. This "novum" is surprisingly irreducible to the kind of configuration with which we are already familiar. The tension is irreconcilable because the new paradigms, perspectives and presuppositions are so different. As Palácio puts it tersely, "what is in play is not just this or that element in isolation, it is the project of life in its totality'.

The solution Palácio sees is that experienced by Abraham our father in faith, when he was called to sacrifice the son in whom all his hopes were invested, for the fulfillment of the promise made to him by God. The attitude that is needed now is both sacrificial and exodal. "leave your country and go... to the place that I will show you" (Gen 12, 4).

We need to re-create, starting from the roots, the present form of religious life, which authority espouses. This form of religious life must be revitalized in three foundational elements.

- in the way of experiencing the God of the Promise;
- in the perception and discernment of the challenges that lie at the heart of our lived reality;
- and in the choice of ways and means that are able, in the light of today's culture, to point out how the Kingdom that we await tomorrow is already present.

My conclusion, after this analysis of the historical process of *Religious Life* in Latin America is rather like that of Palácio: the task of *Religious Life* is not only that of "building" a model, but of letting itself be modeled by God, at the historical cross-road to which the Spirit of Jesus is leading us, on this continent of "laid open veins".



44th General Chapter

TESTIMONY ON SUFFERING AND LIFE

*Bishop Luciano Mendes Almeida, S.I. **, August 21, 2000

Thank you for the opportunity to be here. Seeing all of the flags at the back of the aula, I see a symbol of the extensive evangelization that is taking place throughout the world; an evangelization which is centered on the Passion of Jesus and on a passion for the world.

I wondered what would be the best thing to say to you; the Chapter organizers asked me for a “witness”. What are the key ideas around which I should build this dialogue and witness with you? They will be both subjective and personal.

The first thing that seems lacking in the lives of priests and religious is an adequate awareness of the world in which we live. We are unaware of the vastness of the history of this world; we think back only as far as the wars of the past century, we are a part of that period of history. Human life, however, is a whole; one enters into this human family’s history of suffering and joy. If we had lived at the end of the 1800's, the reality would have been very different. But in our time, we are in the midst of very rapid changes which challenge us every day more and more. Medellín and Santo Domingo gave us an opportunity to reflect on these challenges. There are many other parts of the world which have elements in common with life as lived in Latin America, for example, Africa. The common element between these two is poverty; both have populations which are totally marginalized.

A great part of humanity is not only in poverty, but in misery. It is a scandal that our society should be so. We dream of fraternity, of being children of God. We are Catholics, we belong to that part of the human family that links with the person of Jesus. Social injustice is a grave injustice. This is an existential question, and a very difficult one to solve. Thirty years ago we wanted to change the way things were. Violence was not ruled out, so great was our shock at seeing so many people without food, and without the basic necessities of life. All of us have had a chance to confront specific instances of suffering; think of Burundi, Yugoslavia; such injustice and violence are not new, they have always existed. Did you think that perhaps we had brought these situations to an end. They perdure in spite of our being better educated and in spite of our economic progress.

In 1981, I visited Central America and was deeply impressed by the bishops; it was at a time when armed groups were everywhere. I was one of three Bishops present at Archbishop Oscar Romero’s funeral in San Salvador. On the streets of my own cities, I’ve been in the midst of assassins. For two decades, Brazil had a military government that was very violent; it wasn’t long ago that torture and

assassinations were quite frequent. My life has been indelibly marked by these realities of our society in Latin America.

There has been a significant change in what today we would call “moral principles”.

There was a book called: “What do you Think of Unbelief?” It was a discussion between Umberto Eco and Cardinal Martini of Milano. Some people said that both of them were confused because they thought that it was still possible to have universal moral principles. We are a people who have lived through the atomic bomb; in Japan there is a museum that commemorates the experiences of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. What do the nations think of the mass destruction wrought by these bombs? Our fundamental moral principles have changed; we are now acting on our individual, personal principles. This has led to great discoveries in biology, medicine and science; they are technological advances, but without moral advantage. The beginning of this new century will enter into history bearing the wounds of violence and moral decline. For example, what will cloning really mean in the future? The whole area of genomes is beyond our ability to grasp its further implications.

Our faith has a history, just as does our world. The entry of God’s Son into history affects the very foundations of our lives. At this time, we are called to reflect on this central event in history. Additionally, this Jubilee year encourages us to reflect on this greatest event in history - the birth of the son of God who is the savior of the world. What is striking is the manner in which he entered this world - we would expect him to come in majesty and light and glory. But Philippians teaches us that Jesus did not consider his equality with God a treasure to be guarded jealously; instead, he took on the characteristics of a Servant in our history. He came as an ordinary man - Jesus Crucified - who died for me. It is Jesus who lives in me, who lives and dies for me. This is the vital point of our spirituality. “*Cur Deus homo?*” The *Summa* tried to answer why God became man. But perhaps the hardest question is: why did God die on the Cross? Why did He take upon himself the form of a servant, why become like a criminal who gives his life for us? Why did Jesus live without privilege? Why did Jesus choose to ally Himself with the excluded? Why did He die between two criminals, to all appearances, just like them?

His passion for humanity made him assume the sufferings of humanity, the pain of humanity, even the death of human beings. This is the sign of the greatest love: that one give one’s life for one’s own friends.

We ask why we are immersed in a world filled with violence and misery. If God exists, then theologically speaking, how can the world be so mired in violence, in sin? Norberto Bobbio writes to me at times - and I have been able to visit him. The his last letter to me, he wrote that the real problem that prevents him

from accepting faith is the suffering of humanity. Another friend used to say to me: "I cannot believe in a god who allows suffering in this world. How does suffering allow for the presence of god in the history of the world?"

For these reasons I believe the Passionists have a key role in the world today. For Paul of the Cross, the Cross is a light which shines into the shadows of our darker sides. And that is your heritage. Some people have the idea that God gives good things to the good; bad things, evil to the evil. It is a very simplistic idea; but it does not reflect our understanding of the world we live in. Why does a good person suffer? This theory tests God. God gives people times of testing so that they can grow and achieve a greater understanding. This idea, however, does not account for the suffering of Jesus. Jesus did not enter into this world to gain merit; rather, he came to suffer in solidarity with us, the human family. The suffering of the just one - for the unjust. This is the mercy of God; when we gaze at Jesus on the Cross, when we see his human suffering, our eyes are dazzled by the sight. Mark 8 speaks of Peter's rejecting Jesus' prophecy of suffering; Jesus tells Peter that he does not understand the heart of God. The only really good person submits to the cross of the condemned out of love for us. John 13:1 - he is the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep - the grain of wheat that must fall to the ground and die in order to give fruit.

Jesus wants to respect human freedom - and even a world in its perversity - He respects this world and its history. He accepts us as a demonstration of love. He allows us to be drawn to himself on the cross (John 12). In his solidarity with us (Hebrews 2:15), like us in all things but sin, he took on our nature and entered this world for one reason only: to give us proof of his love for us who are his brothers and sisters. Jesus suffered our hunger and thirst, our tiredness; and he had to flee from those who would stand in his way. Finally, he hands himself over to the authorities who condemn him. Jesus desired to draw us to himself, and to the God of mercy, whose heart is that of an infinitely merciful mother. St. Thomas tells us that God came from the Father and returned to the Father. The spirituality of the cross is a light to our lives - it is the unique event in history and the solution to the mysteries of evil in our world today.

God respects human liberty - but to believe in this love is our challenge. This is the great sign that will bring us to salvation in spite of a perverted world, and that will help us to understand the presence of evil in our world. This is a human way of discovering light and truth, and to understand our world through the cross of Christ. The Cross should be upon our hearts, our faith should acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, thus we will grasp the greatest proof that Our Father, who gives us everything, will even give us an understanding of our own history. God could have done away with the world, but He accepts and understands and respects our world - he wanted to offer the path to understanding and awareness of the love He holds for us.

Those in solidarity with the suffering of Jesus, can overcome any of the difficulties of the world in which we live. Without this understanding, the world will certainly defeat us. We are to make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. The Madonna is, of course, a sign of this same mystery: the sinless one is also the Mother of Sorrows. Her sufferings are also a liberating suffering; not a punishment for sin or wrongdoing because she is without sin.

Just think of the Russian submarine that is lying so tragically during this very time under the Arctic Ocean. We have an example in the efforts to rescue the crew, all of whom had died. Those who tried to rescue the crew, at a great personal risk, and those who did all they could to find a way to rescue the crew, both had no moral guilt in the matter. Nevertheless, they faced great personal danger in order to do a good thing for their brothers who were lying at the bottom of the ocean, and might or might not be still alive. This is only a small shadow or hint of the risk which Jesus took on the Cross. Had one of those rescuers died in the attempts to save the crew, or had one succeeded, he would certainly have been a hero, even a bereaved one. Jesus has taken on the Cross and saved us in the very same way.

Sin exists in the world and we have the freedom to be wounded by it. Even in our most trying moments, God loves us. Any one of us might come down with cancer, might have an accident – but that would not mean that I am guilty of some grave sin. Suffering is the product of sin, not necessarily my own personal sin, still as a result of sin. These very strange sounding words were prayed by Jesus: “I pray for them - I do not ask to take them from the world” (John 17). Jesus tells us not to be afraid, because we have the Spirit who will be with us. We are here to help those who suffer, we have the same mission as Jesus - to be sinless and to give signs of love to our brothers and sisters with whom we traverse this world.

By being here we can help liberate others from a world held captive by sin. If we give love, we know that we are sharing the love of God - and thus we are witnesses to the world. The first focal point is the world, the second is the Cross. With this point of view, we have a new understanding of why “the good” suffer. This is a different point of view from that of the Old Testament Patriarchs. This time has passed. Jesus was no patriarch - not someone who came to live a life of plenty - but to proclaim a new perspective on human life and new way of understanding the meaning of life - through the light of the Cross. We cannot see anything in theology without the light of the Cross; we might as well be blind as we look into the anguished human face of history. However, the Cross assures us that God loves us - and that we are here to be embraced by God.

We might consider the experience of François Chevalier and his nine years in a Vietnamese prison because he was a believer and a bishop. Nine years in a cell with no window. Why did he suffer like this?

God has set us free of the thinking that suffering is tied to personal sin. Our Blessed Lady--the mother of grace, our passage out from sin, the goodness of God, are signs of God's love and of our unimpeded return to God. This is how life is; we are at the foundations of our faith here.

Personally, I've had some very difficult times in my life. Ten years ago I was in an auto accident, and had to have many surgeries - about 14 operations. The very fact that I survived that accident ten years ago while a friend died of his injuries, still amazes me. Why did it have to happen to me? Why to my friend? We do not normally expect miraculous interventions; there are accidents, there are disasters; the world is not free of tragedy. On the contrary, we are in the world we must come to grips with it. I have been able to work with prisoners, and now with street children. All of these experiences are better understood through the Passion of Jesus. Charles de Foucauld used to pray, "I do not ask for what others ask for, but ask only for what others do not ask for. I pray that I might be like Jesus". Over time, Mother Teresa became the "mother" of India because of her vast charity and love for the helpless and the poor of the world, particularly of in India.

"I am learning" - it something that happens little by little. Salvation comes in stages. Suffering is progressing step by step toward the realization of our hope.

Are there reasons for hope in today's world? We are threatened by bombs and ecological disaster - what do we need? The answer lies in the fact that God gave us his son; and at the same time, we are to live in a world gripped by sin, in which we proclaim the freely-given love of God, in which we are asked to be messengers of love in the midst of the world, giving substance to hope. If we feed the hungry, promote better laws for a more just distribution of goods, share with others a respect for cultures, and are capable of speaking to all persons in a respectful dialogue, then it is sure that our lives are being given for others, even for those who do not agree with us. The Church which welcomes and serves will discover in dialogue both humility and weakness. "Do not be afraid - I have overcome the world".

This is our joy, that we can live in faith. We do not see the horizon of our faith, but live in hope of God's love. Our young today do not have a clear vision of their horizons - but we can share our hope with them. Religious vocations are few; we are not adequately dialoguing with the world of today. Take, for example, biological experimentation. All things work together for good - if there is love. We have hope but we do not have proof. We have that faith which comes to us from the hope illumined by the light of the Cross of Jesus. We have great projects for the new millennium, but through the light of the Cross, we enter into real joy.

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HOMILY ON THE COMMEMORATION OF L.A. MARTYRS

Card. Paulo Evaristo Arns, O.F.M. * August 25, 2000.

Introduction to the Mass.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation to take part in this gathering which will have such important consequences for the Congregation and for the Church. I feel very close to the Passionists because I was born on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the 14th of September; I was baptized on the feast of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi; but mainly because I was named a bishop on a Good Friday, at the “ninth hour”. I feel very allied with all that the Passionists do, with the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Yesterday, I received an invitation to take part in the Jubilee Year Mass for the incarcerated. In reply, I spoke of my satisfaction at being able to work with those who are sick and behind bars, they must be about 400 out of 2,500. These 400 have all of the imaginable illnesses; some have AIDS, others have lost limbs, or have some other serious impediments. I intend to celebrate that Holy Mass together with the Passionist Community of Sao Paulo, which works with the poor and on behalf of the incarcerated, as the community of the incarcerated celebrates this Jubilee Year.

Homily

We should take up the message of Saint Mark, directed to all of humanity throughout history, but especially to us Passionists, who are gathered here today.

Saint Mark always refers to keeping secret Jesus’ works on behalf of the people. Now, from the Cross, as we have seen, he reveals the meaning of the secret: He is the Son of God. The work of the Passionists should convey this message, that today the time for secrecy is over, that it is a time for proclamation, the proclamation that God sent his own Son so that He might be preached and proclaimed to all the peoples.

This is what the life of St Paul of the Cross was about, to reveal Christ in that crucified reality which made even the soldiers marvel before Him. This revelation is so powerful that it is capable of reaching all of our brothers and sisters, and of transforming them into a proclamation of Good News of salvation, salvation through suffering and through the total oblation of Christ to the Father.

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May this Chapter find the way to instill in the hearts of all of the members of the Congregation the importance of returning to this secret of St Mark in everything that we do. It is a secret only until it can be joined to the complete offering of Christ to the Father, who appears to have abandoned Him exactly at that moment in which he was being drawn into the Father together with the universal forgiveness for all the sins of the world.

This message of St Paul of the Cross has never been more timely. I was in Rome in 1995, at the time of reprinting my book, “Saints and Heroes of the People”, and I asked my colleague and great friend, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, “How many martyrs have been beatified by the Pope?” He replied that in 1995, up to the 19th of September, His Holiness John Paul II had beatified exactly 618 persons. He added that of these, 451 were martyrs, 151 confessors of the faith. In the ten years, 1985 to 1995, 451 were officially recognized as martyrs for having given their lives for the love of Christ and for giving up their lives to the Father for a Crucified Christ. Furthermore, 273 had been canonized; and of these, 240 were martyrs, 28 were Confessors of the faith. A total of 451 Blessed Martyrs, and 240 Martyr Saints.

We are living at a time of suffering and blood, and of love offered to God. It is an age not unlike that of the beginning of Christianity. I had to study and teach this period during 27 years as a Franciscan before I became a bishop. I studied in particular the age of martyrs, the motives behind their martyrdom, and I had the opportunity to become passionately absorbed about the essential characteristics of this martyrdom, which must be like the martyrdom of Christ if it is to be authentic.

However, there is something that made a very deep impression on me; I would like to confess it to my friends gathered here in this holy place. Today we celebrate the first anniversary of the death of our great friend, the Archbishop of Olinda, Dom Helder Camara.

Allow me a moment to refer to the first difficulty which I had in Sao Paulo in January 1971. Don Helder was coming to my house. A whole group of friends had come together from every part of Brazil, and some from other Latin American countries. It was at that time that I made my first denunciation of the torture that was going on; it was the beginning of the martyrdom, the torture of that affected all of the community of Sao Paulo. Don Helder Camara made a reference to Christ who saves the disciples in danger of drowning in the lake of Genessaret. He said that Christ always comes to rescue his Church. Then he added, whoever really loves life, must therefore love even more the God of life; and is able therefore to encourage others to offer their martyrdom in this life so that all of humanity might have more life.

When Don Helder died, the Archbishop of Olinda had the courtesy to invite me to preside at the Month's Mind Mass, since I could not attend the funeral. As the Mass was about to start, he revealed the following to me: Don Helder Camara, who spoke to all of the people of Brazil, who addressed even much of Latin America and the world, who spoke with and even denounced people of great importance, whether from Brazil or from other nations; this Don Helder Camara repeatedly begged the Bishop of Olinda that on his tomb there be written only the phrase, "He lived to celebrate Holy Mass". Every discourse, all of the influence he had gained, all of the glory, all of the titles, all of it disappears in comparison with the importance of one holy Mass for him. The Mass makes present the Passion of Jesus, it makes present the resurrection of Jesus, it makes present the salvation of humanity. "This is the chalice of my Blood which will be shed for you and for all."

Therefore, we who are gathered here, wish to profess our faith in and proclaim the Passion and Death of Jesus. Today we see Jesus in the gospel of Mark saying to the Father in heaven: "Why have you abandoned me?" In every hour we will find comfort, in every situation that life brings, we can always repeat, "If I suffer, my suffering is united with that of Christ crucified, with the Christ of the Passion and Resurrection."

Once, when I went to visit my professor of Church History in Sao Paulo, I told him spontaneously, "You ought not to be surprised, you know well that we are called to love the Church, to love Jesus Christ, we are called to our vocation." Then I added, "Sao Paulo has shown me its wounds." This Cross challenges all of the history of humanity as it reveals itself as part of the history of humanity. The Cross of Christ shows people how to understand the plan of God, how to accept the plan of God, and how to fulfill that plan for all of their lives.

And, if I may leave you with a word of comfort...There is some satisfaction in knowing that for some years, I went several times a week, sometimes every day, to the general barracks of the army in Sao Paulo on behalf of someone, or of many, who were subjected to torture. Each time, as I drove myself to meet the person who could do something to end the torture, I always tried to remember that the one speaking through me was Christ, the one who spoke in me was the Holy Spirit. And while I prepared my speech, while I prepared the words, while I prepared the request to halt the torture, I always recited the prayer to the Holy Spirit, that he would give me the right words. I believe that not one of these prayers was ever useless in diminishing the suffering or in giving a new significance to these sufferings for so many persons here in Sao Paulo, in Latin America, especially in the United States, in Uruguay, in Argentina, in Paraguay.

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I once placed in the hands of Pope Paul VI, as he was visiting the Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida, a list of the missing (*desaparecidos*), and I repeated this gesture to the new government of Argentina; I was also called to the UN for some ecumenical meetings. (At this point the Cardinal, with few but stirring words, made reference to the sufferings which, as at the beginning of Christianity, were inflicted on so many, and whose blood becomes the seeds for new Christians).

May God bless all of the sufferings of humanity, and also our own small portion which we must join with the sufferings of Christ. How many times have I repeated the phrase of Saint Mark, “My God, why have you abandoned me?” Each time, the Father would reply that the men and women who underwent torture would receive from God the strength they needed to one day achieve a normal life here on earth, one which would allow them to enjoy all of God’s love which permeates our world because of the sacrifice of Christ.

As we celebrate this Holy Mass, a celebration of the Passion of Christ, the revelation of the secret of Mark will once again be realized through our hands and for our intentions. Amen. Amen.



FEAST OF THE TRIUMPH OF THE HOLY CROSS

Most. Rev. Fr. Ottaviano D'Egidio, C.P., Superior general

Itaici, September 14th, 2000

Closing the General Chapter

Today, September 14th, 2000, as we celebrate the Triumph of the Holy Cross, we're winding up the 44th General Chapter of our Congregation which has had as its guiding theme, "The Passion of Jesus, Passion for Life." It might seem an anachronism, trying to celebrate the Passion for life while stressing the victory of the Cross, a sordid instrument of death. We've declared our position regarding torture and the death sentence — *"Let no one touch Cain"* — and yet here we are today, acclaiming an artifact upon which a wholly innocent man was put to death, one who had spent his life helping and healing others: *"He has done everything well."* He himself had told the Baptist's disciples, *"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them"* (Lk 7:22). And a woman would cry out, *"Blessed ... are the breasts at which you nursed"* (Lk 11:27). And He, Jesus, that young prophet from Nazareth who was to be hung on a cross following an iniquitous sentence, having been denied any proper defense in a trial which was nothing but an utter farce, his dignity as a human being wholly disregarded as he was struck and spat upon, dressed as a madman and a soothsayer — He, the very wisdom and Word of God by whom all things in heaven and on earth were created — was tortured with a crown of thorns on his head, scourged and bitterly mocked with the words of "ECCE HOMO!" He was an object of pity to behold, *"There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him"* (Is 53:2). So here we are, rejoicing now in the instrument of his death, this frightful gibbet where thieves, slaves and sundry other malefactors were executed and upon which He, who not a cry will utter, led as a lamb to the slaughter, will be nailed. And all this because the presence of Jesus transfixed to that Cross will give life to death, just as the instrument of his torture becomes the throne upon which he will sit: *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"* (Lk 23:42). The artifact of death has been transformed into the instrument of life and herein lies the reason for our rejoicing: in so doing we proclaim the triumph of Life which has been born of it.

In Numbers 21:6 we read, "In punishment the Lord sent among the people saraph serpents, which bit the people so that many of them died... and the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a saraph and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks at it, he will recover'." In today's Gospel passage Jesus recalls

that event and applies it to himself: “*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life*” (Jn 3:14-15). They will look up at the serpent and will be healed, they’ll look back upon the one they’ve transfixed and eternal life will flow from the instrument of death.

Our Congregation was born of that Cross and we desire that the Passion of Jesus and his wounds should energize our lives and ministry as was the case with St. Paul of the Cross. The passion for life impels us forward, even when we don’t turn our backs on our past but rather seek to better understand it so as to construct our future. We follow new roads toward an encounter with those who suffer today. We need to be present in the midst of today’s suffering humanity, where people have lost the meaning of life and demand to know why blood still flows from the Cross even as they hear the peal of the Easter bells. We must help them understand and live the paschal meaning of human suffering, and our redemption which is both nailed to the Cross and flows out to us from it. The laity must share in this mystery in order to be able to discover for themselves and share with us the spirituality of the Passion in both contemplation and mission. It’s not a case of two different lives, mission and contemplation, but rather two different aspects of the same soul, which will empower us to be present in the struggle against marginalization of every sort and in defense of creation.

The Cross should be our folly as well as the object of our love. Through the folly of love we can undertake anything, even radical options as did our Spanish martyrs, Blessed Eugene Bossilkov and Father Carl Schmitz. Through love one dares to die.

On the Cross we discover fullness of life, since Jesus, notwithstanding his divine nature, emptied himself (*kenosis*), taking the form of a slave, and humbled himself even to death on a cross, and the Father has re-filled this emptiness with the fullness of life and glory (cf Phil 2: 5-11).

In (the São Paulo district of) Ipiranga, on the day of the “Excluded,” a cross was erected on a truck which served as a raised platform, with pictures of dollar bills dangling from it, symbolizing the international debt which is crucifying the people of the third world.

What should we dangle from our own cross? What are our pains and difficulties? We might attach our communities in the hope they’ll receive empowerment and a spirit of fraternity, or we might tie on our reluctance to be prophets and to assume the part of the excluded in a forthright and clear manner, or our initial formation, or perhaps even the selfishness tainting our options and the difficulties we experience in being authentic. Certainly we should tie on to our cross this present Chapter and ourselves, with our fears and lack of faith in a

God who never abandons his people, nor the community, nor our Passionist Family, nor the disinherited of all the world, so that they may discover new energies. Of course, we can't just remain there upon the cross. One by one let us silently descend from it, and then take up one of the numberless crosses to be found on mount Calvary, because Jesus has said, *"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"* (Lk 9:23).

It's just possible we might hesitate undertaking a project which we foresee laden with difficulties, especially given a common attitude in the western world which shows scant concern for Jesus and even perceives him as useless and wholly passé. Added to this are the challenges we must face in the developing world which seems to demand an ever greater presence of our diminishing numbers, plus the problems posed by "globalization," a modern phenomenon which seems to stress market values over anything else. All the above can induce a sense of fear coupled to a desire to take refuge behind closed doors in Jerusalem. Yet Jesus respects our fears, just as he did those of the Apostles: he'll come into our secluded place in spite of those locked doors, penetrate our fears and show us his wounds. This will be the Resurrected Jesus and he will say to us, *"Peace be with you... Do not be afraid... I have overcome death."*

Transformed by the Holy Spirit the disciples spread over the world, and we know they were originally just a small band of twelve, plus Mary the mother of Jesus and a few women who prayed. Out yonder was the Roman world with its own peculiar form of globalization, yet with the help of the Holy Spirit, given through those wounds, there followed the proclamation of the Word, a great witnessing and martyrdom. It is our duty also to allow ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Mary, who in a certain sense is the visible figure of the motherhood of God, was ever with Jesus, right at the beginning of his public life in Cana (*"They have no wine!"*) all the way to the very end. She stands at the foot of the cross drained of her blood and dead in her Son, having become, like him, a most pure offering to the Father. Jesus sees her, glances down at her through his swollen eyes stuck with dried blood and sweat, seeing her more in his heart than through those eyes, and says to her, *"Woman, behold your son."* Then, to the disciple, *"Behold, your mother!"* (Lk 19:26). At that very moment Mary engendered in and through the blood of Jesus, and John appeared to have been born again, and all of us together with him. And Mary became the mother of John, and of each one of us, and of our Congregation. Even today we constantly renew in the Eucharist the mystery of that death and that motherhood, thus becoming truly brothers and sisters. The Pasch and the Paschal Mystery with the mystical death of Jesus on the altar which also becomes our own death, take place in one only body and one only spirit. The Passion of Jesus and the

44th General Chapter

Eucharist which renews it causes us all to be intimately united. So forward everybody! Strike out with courage and hope! We are dearly loved by God, and we shall not have to confront the passion of the world alone and disarmed, for we are empowered by the Cross and the Holy Spirit, with the sure knowledge that the Crucified One is the greatest expression of God and, therefore, of life. And then, if God is with us, whence our fear?

We must love life and protect it. So, to conclude, I would like to tell the story of a little turtle-dove who has made her nest in a small bush blooming with violet and white flowers in the garden of one of our courtyards here in this big house in Itaici, not far from where we watch television and have our recreation room. Having fashioned a very simple nest, this small bird duly laid a couple of eggs and proceeded to sit over them. Fifteen days or so later the tiny chicks hatched. But what particularly struck me wasn't so much the appearance of the newborn chicks as the way the mother had gone about her task of brooding the eggs, seeking to maintain them at a constant temperature: all day long she would tirelessly change her position over them with the greatest of patience and love. She has demonstrated a *love for life*. And this, precisely, must be our duty too: we must LOVE LIFE in its totality, in the light and power which comes to us from the Cross. This may sound somewhat utopian, just as the star which guided the wise men to Bethlehem must have appeared to them, but it was by following in the direction marked for them by that utopian star that they eventually came upon a small child of flesh and blood, a little boy by name of Jesus cradled in the arms of his mother, Mary.

Let us entrust this Chapter and everything born of it, our Congregation and the whole of our Passionist Family to the loving protection of Mary and the intercession of our father, St. Paul of the Cross.

