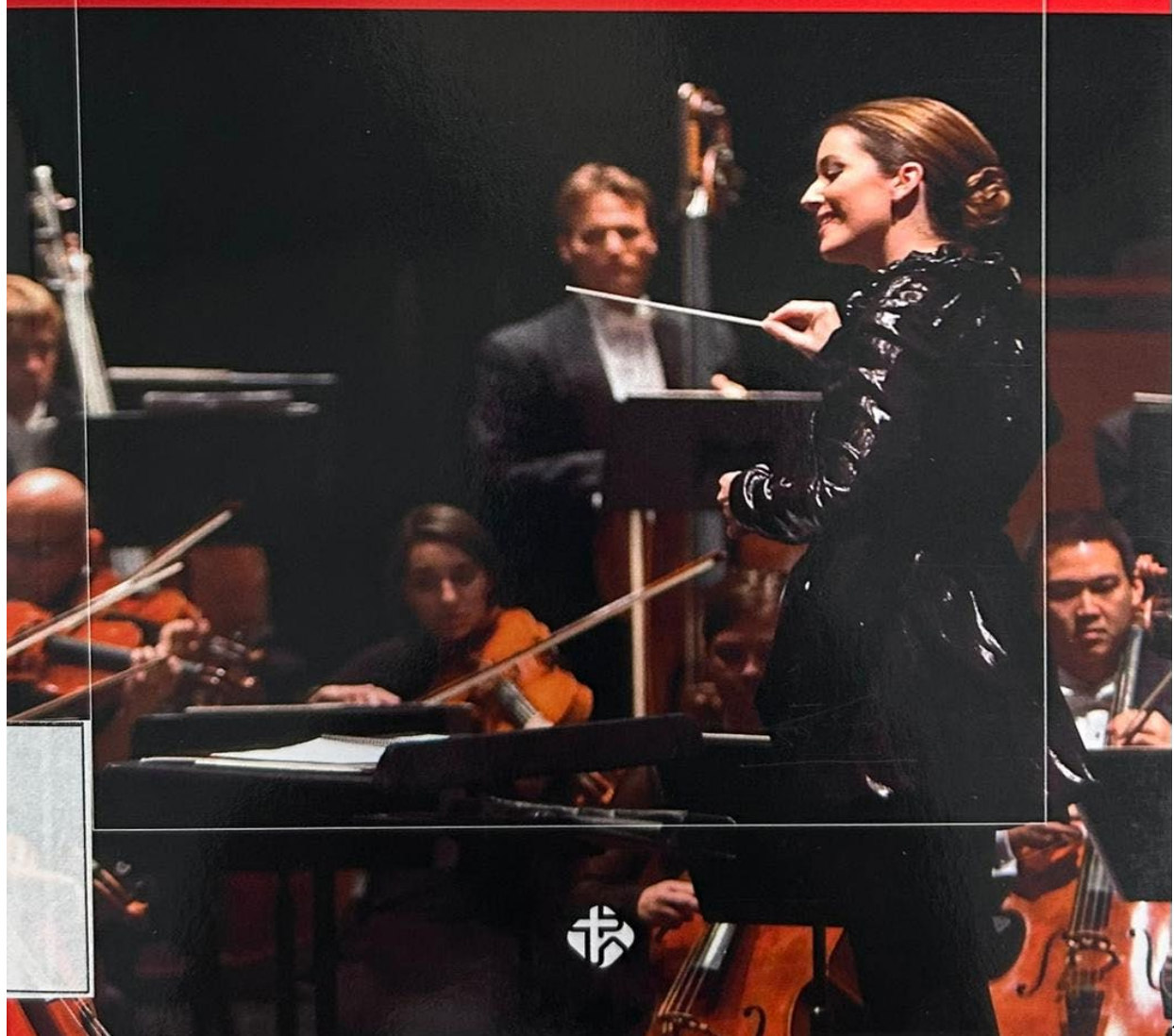


Card. Aquilino Bocos Merino

LEADERSHIP AND PROXIMITY

**The value of presence
in the governance of Consecrated Life**



Leadership and Proximity

The value of presence in the governance of Consecrated Life

[For back cover or inside flaps]

Today the theme of leadership occupies a relevant space in the business, socio-political, and sports worlds, which seeks from it vision, service, organization and motivation. Our model, as consecrated persons, is always Jesus. In him we see the features of presence and closeness proper to those who have to serve their brothers and sisters from leadership and government, promoting the living out of the mystery, the communion, and the mission.

THE AUTHOR

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(Canillas de Esgueva, Valladolid, Spain, 1938). Claretian Missionary. Dedicated to many years of religious formation and internal governance, he was a Provincial Superior and then the Superior General of the Claretians from 1991 to 2003. From these positions he followed very closely the evolution of post-conciliar religious life. He continues to place his vast experience at the service of religious life through publications, conferences, retreats. Archbishop Bocos was appointed Archbishop of Urusi (2018) and, in the consistory of June 2018, Pope Francis made him a Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church.

[Place somewhere the following statement.]

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Aquilino Bocos Merino

Leadership and Proximity

The Value of Presence in the Governance
of Consecrated Life

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FOREWORD

The Leadership of the Conference of Religious Institutes of Portugal (CIRP) kindly invited me to participate in its General Assembly that was to be held in Fatima on November 16 and 17, 2015. The proposed topic was “*Leadership and Proximity in Consecrated Life*.” With their permission, I developed different aspects of the thinking around the governance of the communities. This explains what now appears as the subtitle of the book: “*The Value of Presence in the Governance of Consecrated Life*.”

During these last months I have expanded the reflections that I offered then and I have added two chapters. The First chapter, “Governing Today”, and the one titled “Leadership Has an End, but There Is an After”. Without losing sight of the origin of the assignment and the agreement under development, readers will see that this text revolves around *the presence of leaders* – superiors – in the community. Underlying the exposition is the author's conviction that the *quality of governance* in consecrated life depends today, in large part, on the presence, the use of time and the cordiality of those who govern. Here, for the moment, presence is highlighted, because it is the articulating center of the other two aspects.

In this publication I make, in the first place, some brief considerations about governance in consecrated life. I take as a given the theological and juridical frameworks that surround authority and its exercise in the Church and in consecrated life. It is a simple outline to take account of the current state of governance in the life of the institutes. I have focused attention on presence – proximity – and on leadership. Presence-proximity is a pairing deeply rooted in biblical revelation and is being especially cherished by personalist anthropology. Leadership has occupied a relevant space in the business, socio-political and sports worlds, which insist on it as vision, service, organization, and motivation.

Obviously, if we reflect on leadership, the primary model is Jesus of Nazareth, anointed by the Spirit of the Lord to announce the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18). I add that, when dealing with presence, it is inevitable today to make reference to the digital world and, therefore, to virtual presence. The conclusion is dedicated to governance from the perspective of mercy. The lectures were given on the eve of the opening of the Jubilee of Mercy. Happy coincidence because mercy is true inspiration and encouragement in governance. Mercy goes hand in hand with awe, tenderness, and compassion.

Throughout the following pages *exercise of authority* and *leadership*; *leaders* and *superiors* are used interchangeably. Considering the differences in sensitivity that the words evoke, the reader will appreciate their scope in each context. The level of community - local, provincial, or general - goes without saying every time I speak of leaders^{1*}.

^{1*} Translator's note. In order to maintain gender neutrality the translator has made leader/superior plural, whereas the author used them in singular form.

Underlying these reflections is the understanding of the situation that we are living in consecrated life. There is no need to repeat here what I have written in other publications to

which I will refer.² Yes, I reiterate that, although almost fifty years ago some predicted the death of religious life, it is still alive and strong. It is the work of the Spirit and it has not been given a time limit or a limit of the number of members and works. I am sure that the readers and I agree on what we all seek and yearn for: a consecrated life more identified with Jesus, in his lifestyle and in his fidelity to the will of the Father. For the same reason, more evangelical and communal; more populated with disciples and witnesses and messengers; with more participation and shared responsibility with pastors and lay people; more prayerful and meaningful (transparent and coherent); poorer and more prophetic; more missionary, close to the people and involved in the cause of those who are excluded. We all intend to rekindle our life and our services and transmit the fire of the origins to the new generations. Thanks be to God, utopia persists among us, consecrated men and women, and we want to "wake up the world." We want at all times to have the eyes of sentinels and feet of messengers (cf. Is 52:7-8). We feel like a community of thirsty people, not satisfied people. Because we try to improve and there are possibilities to do so, we work on what can increase its dynamism and growth; that is, on leadership in governance, which promotes living out mystery, communion and mission.

The bar is set very high. I know. Some time ago I was impressed by the poem "Todo ha de ser verdad" [Everything must be true], from which I extract this stanza:

"Because I wait for the light!
I know what I am waiting for when I hurry and urge impatience:
to have a free voice and a free conscience,
a noble gaze and a sincere heart."³

When the mission of governance is accepted, the door of the heart opens and the key is thrown away, at least while the service lasts. A process of vulnerability and resurgence begins at the same time, like the one described by Saint Paul (2 Cor 4:7-15). I hope that the suggestions I offer help those who have received this mission to serve their brothers and sisters to grow in trust and love. Thus, you will see an increase in the number of those who give thanks and testify to the joy of the Kingdom.

I want these pages to be a simple homage to all those consecrated men and women who are in the peripheries and are close – neighbors - to the terminally ill, the elderly, children, the psychically limited, orphans, those suffering loneliness, the incarcerated, immigrants, refugees, the excluded..., and to those who are at the peripheries of culture, education and faith and announce

² Here I only mention these three: *Caminando hacia la aurora. Reorganización de es-structuras en la vida consagrada*. Frontera, n. 70, Vitoria, 2010. *A Tale of the Spirit. Consecrated Life after the Second Vatican Council*, 2nd edition revised and expanded Claretian Publications, Chicago, 2019. «Testigos y profetas de la alegría». VidRel 116 (2014) 4.

³ JESÚS TOMÉ, *Poesía completa*, Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan, 2010, p. 246.

the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Also, to the always admired contemplatives, men and women of peripheries and communion at the same time. We recognize the proximity they all offer and we thank them for the way they challenge us.

Madrid, March 25, 2016

Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul

PART ONE
GOVERNANCE IN CONSECRATED LIFE

"The leader as the servant"

(Lk 22:26b)

Authority is exercised "not with dominating power,

but with love that serves"

(Saint Augustine, Rule XI)

1. GOVERNING TODAY

Governing is, has been, and will always be a challenge. Governing well is, ultimately, quite an art. Throughout its extensive history, religious life has learned to govern itself and has managed to find the best way to do it. However, the impact on governance in consecrated life, after the Second Vatican Council, has been and continues to be so strong that there are many unanswered questions even today. It is not surprising that this is so, since the quality of governance depends, to a large extent, on progress in the other areas of formation, spirituality, apostolic action, and economics. If governance is doing well, people and institutions are doing well. And when can one say that there is quality in governance? No doubt when there is quality in the leaders who share life and mission with the communities. Governance drives innovation and promotes charismatic and prophetic growth. In docility to the Spirit, it recreates, renews, gives new meaning, and transforms the life of the community. Those who govern continue the mission of Jesus, "the Shepherd who has great eyes" (Abercius) who, with mercy, accompanies all those he has introduced into the new covenant that He inaugurated.

Consecrated life continues to need people who open new paths for it, who raise spirits and provide trust and enthusiasm to their brothers and sisters, who turn their problems into new opportunities, who make free wills converge and intertwine to carry forward the intuitions of the founders and foundresses in service of the Kingdom.

1. Governance, Post-Conciliar Renewal, and Leadership

Anyone who observes the history of religious life will see that the great Rules of the Monastic Orders and the Constitutions of the Conventual Orders were full of evangelical wisdom and practical guidelines for community life, both looking inwards as well as toward the local Church and society. The processes of secularization, which have their roots in nominalism, led to putting mankind in the forefront. From theocentrism to anthropocentrism. History begins to be lived as history-of-freedom. From the Enlightenment until today we are in the process of emancipation, increasingly subtle, intelligent, but at the same time more ambiguous. The influences of idealism, romanticism, dialectical materialism, existentialism, structuralism, and all positive sciences, have left deep marks on mankind in our time and it is difficult to escape from them.

The ambiguity of this process of enlightenment has entailed the breakdown of authentic traditional values, which we now miss, and its replacement by another axiology, complex and problematic in some aspects: the emergence and practice of an ethic that is permissive and laxist, anarchistic, of a social conformist without a personal life's work or program and driven solely by a demagogic consumerism, the disintegration of human relations and the so-called "impoverishment of the human spirit", which gives way to a growing disenchantment, de-poetization, de-divinization and demythologization. Simultaneously, the positive sciences, which trigger and promote progress and technology, evolve into a possible threat to human subsistence and ecological balance.

This process of enlightenment and technification was ambiguous. In fact, already from the perspective of a positive judgment of the situation, especially after World War II, the human

sciences (sociology, psychology, and pedagogy) developed rapidly and systematized their knowledge. They contributed to highlighting people's autonomy, their rights, and their evolutionary and relational aspects. A new awareness was gained of communal and ethnic rights and of the protagonism of the people. Work, science, politics, and religion earned new value. The primacy of the will gave way to motivation, to the ideal. From speaking of a young man of *character*, we went on to talk about the *ideal* of the young man, the *ideal* of the monk and the *ideal* of the priest.

In this historical journey it is easy to see that the religious institutes, despite their charismatic origins, let themselves be influenced by rationalization, individualism, and institutionalization. The evangelical motivations were taken for granted and the ascetical or legal-moral norms became points of reference to guide life in the communities for centuries. To govern was to apply the laws and to enforce them.

The conciliar renewal, from the sources of the Gospel and the charismatic origins, caused a change in the way of understanding the exercise of authority and the praxis of obedience (cf. LG and PC). The models of autocratic, managerial, and paternal-maternal governance were reviewed, as well as that of the "laissez-faire" model. The Church highlighted the relationship of Christ the Head with its members and the dignity of the person, as a free and responsible subject. Christ is present in the community of his disciples and followers, whom he invites to seek the will of the Father in all things.

Throughout these fifty years, the figure and mission of superiors have been the object of constant reflection. Biblical, Christological and ecclesiological studies and the progress of anthropology, psycho-sociology, and pedagogy have helped the Magisterium. There was a time when everything was taken up by the *service of animation* which tried to involve the people in their process of well-rounded development and, thus, abundant publications appeared about the superior animator of the community. Later, pastoral service was accentuated, as it appears in the current Code of Canon Law, and in the latest Church documents that address the issue.⁴ In recent years, everything has revolved around *leadership*, a word coming from the Anglo-Saxon culture that covers many concerns and aspirations, although it has not yet been consecrated by the Magisterium. The language about leadership puts the accent on the available presence, welcoming, facilitating, and serving, which accompanies, guides and stimulates. It is the bearer of a new sensibility. The document *The Service of Authority and Obedience*,⁵ according to evangelical presuppositions, without using the word leadership, offers a rich vision of the exercise of authority with the theme of participative and compassionate service.

⁴ Cf. CICLSAL: *Essential Elements* (EE), 1983; *Fraternal Life in Community* (FLC), 1994; *The Service of Authority and Obedience* (SAO), 2008. The last two documents have been very well accepted among men and women religious. Cf. ANGEL APARICIO, *La vida religiosa. Documentos conciliares y posconciliares*. Madrid: PCI, 2008, 4th ed.

⁵ Commentary on this document, cf. I SIMPOSIO ITVR, (Eusebio Hernández, Agostino Gardin, Severino María Alonso, Monserrat Viñas, Elías Royón) *La obediencia y la autoridad*. Madrid: PCI, 2009. Other references to the subject, cf. SEVERINO M^a ALONSO, *La autoridad en la vida consagrada, Un carisma de animación-comunión*. Madrid: PCI, 2009, 2nd ed.; Aa.Vv. «La autoridad que el Señor nos ha dado (2Co 10,8)». SalTer (octubre 2010); Aa.Vv. *L'autorità un servizio pasquale*. Dossier de Consacrazione e Servizio 64 (2015) 4; Aa.Vv. «Del amor al servicio». *Testimonio* 271 (2015).

Those who look back and review the classic texts of governance in the Church and in the religious orders and congregations will observe that many of the traits that we attribute to leadership today are expressed in them. A study comparing the great rules and the Magisterium and the contributions of the treaties on leadership would be enlightening. Although, as is obvious, the respective contexts would have to be taken into account. The organization of the Monastic and Conventual Orders influenced the ordering of the society of their times and later times. Now it seems that it is society that seeks to take the initiative and influence the ordering of the Church and consecrated life. There are distinct contributions and we participate in a fruitful exchange that is only hindered when the foundations from which the Church-consecrated life and society depart (companies, political, educational and sports associations, etc.) are forgotten. In ecclesial life and in religious institutes, it is not - should not be - prestige, efficiency, performance, power or profit, that are its inspiration and motivation, but rather service, just as Jesus of Nazareth reflected in his lifestyle and with his words of authority. Also, his followers should arouse astonishment at their doctrine and speak as those who have authority (cf. Mk 1:22; Lk 4:31).⁶

2. Another perspective

Indeed, today governance in consecrated life is situated in another dimension; on another level of origin and purpose. It moves between the coordinates of communion and the evangelizing mission. The ways of thinking and planning, then, are different. As well as of acting. Consecrated life is understanding that good governance does not prioritize the organization and administration of structures as much as the quality of the people who exercise authority. There is a new understanding of the world, the Church, consecrated life and the person, which is very different from the one that existed before the Council, to use a more familiar point of reference. The Institutes have acquired another social, ecclesial, and missionary sensibility that is much more creative and committed. Globalization, digitalism, cultural differences, migrations, concern for ecology and a decrease or aging of members of religious families in the West, put the people who govern a community - be it local, provincial or general - in patient and hopeful waiting, in constant discernment and promotion, with the cooperation of all and in processes of regeneration and transformation.

We move within a sociocultural context full of novelties in methods of communication. The technology is new and the languages are new. The behaviors are also new. In this digital age we are not mere spectators. We also want to be witnesses and prophets of closeness and compassion. When identity, personal relationships, and the perception of space and time are reconsidered, those who govern have to face the challenge of renewed inculturation, which requires assuming and redeeming the current situation in fruitful dialogue. Inculturation in this digital age is one of the greatest challenges for formation and governance.

⁶ The authority of Jesus in Mark "is an authority to teach men the way of God and free them from whatever binds them (1:21-28), to offer them the forgiveness of their sins and to communicate a new life (2:1-12), to denounce the abuses and injustices committed in the name of religion (11:15-19; cf. 11:27-33). In parallel, the followers of Jesus have to continue this same task (3:14-15; 6:7; 13:33), and the Spirit that they have received from him, through their adherence to Jesus, will enable them to carry it out," FERNANDO CAMACHO ACOSTA. "La exousía o autoridad de Jesús en el Evangelio de Marcos". *Isidorianum* 32-33 (2007) 196.

This is the reason why I consider that *presence*, *time*, and *cordiality* are three dynamics that empower governance in religious life. They are models of communion, dedication, and disposition in helping people in their life and mission. They are three words that, analyzed in their content, allow for revealing the category of religious superior as that of a charismatic leader. They interrelate and complement each other in service. Successfully combining presence, time, and cordiality is a guarantee for journeying together and accompanying with assurance, freedom, hope, and love.

3. Open Questions

Governing is not a matter of theory, but of life. “*All theory, dear friend, is gray, but the golden tree of life springs ever green*” (Goethe). In a time like ours, where many prescriptions are given and delving deep into important issues is scarce, it is worth examining the relationships that mediate between space, time, and the person as a free subject. How do we live the here and now of our religious life? How do we live in the present, *the “today” of God*, which is so full of opportunities for the growth of the Kingdom? How do we face the future considering the limitations, threats, and possibilities that surround us? How are we going to support the great options of the Church and consecrated life: the option for the poor, for the evangelizing mission and for universal fraternity? What doors do we open and what novel proposals do we offer?

When we talk about governance, we usually think about the strength of the organization as a whole (the institute, province, or community) and how it can improve its functioning. It is rarely noticed that change begins in the example of the leaders, that is, their consistent presence and authoritative word. If they do not dignify their presence, are not careful of their time and do not devote themselves entirely, little will change for the better. In order for their presence to be regenerative and transformative, they should not stop asking themselves and trying to answer these questions: Where is consecrated life going and where is the Congregation going? What is it that makes the community move forward? These questions help to discern the habitual way of behaving; they make the dreams, the vision, and the deep dispositions of those who govern fruitful and they open the way for going out from their interior lives towards the other members of the community. Governance authenticates itself in the journey of the paschal mystery. Its *secret*: the total surrender; experiencing that the tomb is empty and sharing the joy that Jesus is alive and goes before us. This is how routine, which is a sign of death, is overcome and new paths are begun again for people and institutions.

The exercise of authority is linked to prudence, which involves seeing, anticipating and providing. Prudence and experience intertwine. It is half gift and half something learned. Nobody teaches another to be prudent, but you can warn about what is and what is not prudent. Nurturing it is also required. One can be recognized as a leader, but whoever is chosen for it has to get training. And the first thing is not the techniques but rather to ask for wisdom like the friends of God and prophets (Wis 7:27). That wisdom goes together with the gift of counsel; that gift that leaders receive when they are counseled by the Spirit in concrete and especially difficult cases.

2. GOVERNING THROUGH LEADING

If the two words "govern" and "lead" come together, it is to confront the two aspects that condition governance of consecrated life today: 1) the complexity of the exercise of authority, and 2) the urgency to face the challenges that surround it.

1. The Complexity of Governance Today

We are religious. We live in community and live in mission. We are organized in institutes. The Church organizes the regulations of the governance of the institutes in three articles: 1) Superiors and Councils, 2) Chapters and 3) Temporal Goods and their Administration.⁷ Underlying these canons is a long history of wisdom and praxis of governance among the various institutes of religious life. What I want to emphasize here or bring to the forefront is the breadth of what is covered when we say "governance". Implicit in that word is that inherent complexity to the exercise of the authority that is called to welcome, discern and decide in the face of the great challenges we consecrated men and women experience in each historical moment.

a) Governing: To See, to Anticipate and to Provide

Some Gospel texts immerse us in the need to *see, anticipate, and provide*. "Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion?" (Lk 14:28). And in John we see that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with her special intuition and persistence as a woman of the Kingdom, advances the "hour" of Jesus (cf. Jn 2:1-12). "When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick" (Mt 14:14). "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat" (Mt 15:32).⁸

Jesus has taught us to see. How did he see the rich young man, the widowed mother, Nicodemus, John and Andrew, Peter who confesses he is the Messiah and who denies him, Matthew and the apostles, Zacchaeus, the Greeks who come to see him, Herod and Pilate, and his Mother Mary? They all enter into the plan of salvation. No one would think that the Spirit could manifest its divine power walking among the poor, among the crippled and blind, among corrupted institutions, among children and sinful women. While ordinary people would simply see fields, flowers and birds, the flocks, the harvest and the vineyard, the fishermen and those collecting taxes; the exhausted crowd and the clothes of the powerful men that move about insensitive to others, Jesus discovers the footprints of God and his plan for people and events.

⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) (1983), cc. 617-640. See a commentary of these canons in DOMINGO J. ANDRÉS. *Las formas de vida consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2005, pp. 133ff.; VELASIO DE PAOLIS. *La vida consagrada en la Iglesia*. Madrid: BAC, 2011, pp. 203ff. Cardinal De Paolis explains the connection between superiors, councils and chapters and, therefore, the interrelation between personal governance and collegial governance. "The governance of the institute is never simple and purely collegial or personal. Personal governance, in effect, is tempered by the presence of a council; in this way, personal governance tends towards collegiality, but without it becoming a college of equals. Collegial governance, given its extraordinary character and being limited to the major decisions and directives of the institute, necessarily demands personal governance, which must carry out these decisions in the concrete and daily life of the institute. Therefore, we can speak of a personal governance with a dimension of collegiality, and of a collegial governance that refers to a personal governance." (p. 205)

⁸ In this age in which fluidity increases, it becomes more necessary to adjust the lens, measure endurance and, above all, exercise compassion.

M. Merleau-Ponty said, "It is true that the world is what we see and, nevertheless, we have to learn to see it."⁹ It is essential to make an effort to discover what is shown to us and read into it the things that transcend the immediate experience. It is good to ask ourselves: What do we read into the changing of the times, the path of the Church and the numbers in consecrated life and in the Congregation? What signs of new life do we perceive or illuminate? What is our status as sentinels and scouts and at what level is our fidelity? In the governance of the communities, the principal agent is the Holy Spirit, because it is He who calls us, makes us brothers and sisters in Christ and impels us to the mission. Therefore, it is insisted that "A personal and confident participation in the community's life and mission is required of all its members. Even if, in the end, according to proper law, it is the task of authority to make choices and decisions, daily living in community requires a participation which allows for the exercise of dialogue and discernment."¹⁰ Evidently personal superiors, who are brothers among brothers, and sisters among sisters¹¹ have a particular mission. It is primarily up to them to lead the community (local, provincial or general) to perfection, free it from all obstacles, open it fully to the action of the Spirit of God and coordinate, with respect and love, all their gifts and put them in service of the Gospel. From this basic presupposition, it can be said that good governance of the institutes and of the communities today passes through the charismatic communion of people who think in the key of hope and are involved in the mission. An institute is, above all, a living community and is not reducible to mere external organization. It can be said that it is a living system, with charismatic roots and theological dynamics.¹² When we do not lose sight of what lies at its foundation or what revitalizes it, the connection between its diverse elements takes on a new meaning.

Governance assumes an acute vision of the changes we are experiencing and the goals we want to reach; taking charge of the situation we are going through and the challenges we face; and adjusting the means at our disposal to reach the intended goals. The examples and lives of great men and women who wisely and prudently led their churches and their communities help in governance. Let us think of Saint Augustine, Saint Benedict, Saint Gregory the Great, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas of Villanueva, Saint Teresa of Jesus, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John Baptist of the Conception, Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, etc.¹³

⁹ M. MERLEAU-PONTY. *Lo visible y lo invisible*. Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1970, p. 20. The author tries to learn to look and expand the viewpoint in JOSEP M. ESQUIROL. *El respeto o la mirada atenta*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2006. The author deals with the pedagogy of the way of looking in BYUNG-CHUL HAN. *La sociedad del cansancio*. Barcelona: Herder, 2012, pp. 53-60.

¹⁰ *Starting Afresh from Christ (SAfC)*, 14.

¹¹ By personal superiors we mean the physical persons who fulfill their function and exercise their power in the local, provincial, and general community. Cf CIC, 617. Commentary in DOMINGO J. ANDRÉS. *Las formas de vida consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2005, p. 135.

¹² For that reason, it is legitimate to speak of an institute's proper style of governance. In fact, "Superiors fulfill their duty of service and leadership within the religious institute in conformity with its distinctive character. Their authority proceeds from the Spirit of the Lord through the sacred hierarchy, which has granted canonical erection to the institute and authentically approved its specific mission" (MR 13). And in the following paragraph: "Religious superiors have a grave duty, their foremost responsibility in fact, to assure the fidelity of the members to the charism of the Founder" (MR 14, c).

¹³ Because they are less well-known, I mention ST. GREGORY THE GREAT. *The Book of Pastoral Rule: St. Gregory the Great* (Popular Patristics Series, Book 34) George E. Demacopoulos (Translator) Publisher: St Vladimirs

Governance is concrete and this allows for different implications. It is carried out in a context of space and time and in a culture. It acquires a particular method according to the forms of consecrated life and according to the proper charism of the institute.¹⁴ It has a different connotation according to the male or female gender.

The service of *seeing, anticipating and providing* is not a cold and calculating strategy, but a positive and compassionate way of seeing, steeped in that benevolence that God always shows towards the world and towards each person, whom he calls by name.

b) Governance, the Transversal Axis of Consecrated Life

It is a fact that governance traverses all areas of religious life. Those who govern and lead the communities, especially at the provincial and general levels, have to be aware of people and works, of internal relationships in the communities and of ecclesial and social relationships. They have to take care of, in a balanced way, the mission, spirituality, vocation ministry, initial and ongoing formation, and economy.

The dynamics of governance are governed by principles, which "are deep, fundamental truths, classic truths, and generic common denominators. They are tightly interwoven threads running with exactness, consistency, beauty, and strength through the fabric of life."¹⁵ Principles have value at all times and in all circumstances. They are a sign of security and of devotion in service. I consider the most important things in our consecrated life to be: the Trinitarian principle, the principle of following Christ, the ecclesial principle, the Marian principle, the principle of mission, the personal principle (primacy of the person), the principle of charity-fraternity, and the principle of mercy and hope. These principles are expressed through certain dynamics¹⁶ which, in

Seminary, 2007. But also, BALTASAR GRACIÁN, *The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence*, originally published in 1647, Penguin Classics, 2011. ÁNGEL AYALA. *El arte de gobernar*. Madrid: BAC, 2002. In: *Obras completas*, vol. 4. A post-conciliar figure in governance was Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who was illuminating both by his way of proceeding and by his magisterium: Cf. GIANNI LA BELLA (ed.), *Pedro Arrupe, General de la Compañía de Jesús*. Bilbao: Sal Terrae-Mensajero, 2007. In recent years, there have been lavish amounts of political and business literature on the art of governing, directing and leading.

¹⁴ To begin with, we must say no to the homogenization of governance of religious institutes. Affirming this existential dimension of consecrated life and its governance, it should be noted that apostolic religious life is lived according to different charisms in the Church and each institute has its own nature of governance. "It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church (LG 44; cf. CD 33; 35, 35.1, 2, etc.). "This *distinctive character* also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements. In this hour of cultural evolution and ecclesial renewal, therefore, it is necessary to preserve the identity of each institute so securely, that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way" (MR 11). The CIC (1983) refers to the proper nature of each Institute. It does so 21 times in the cc. 573-709, regarding religious life, and 6 times in the cc. 731-746 in relation to the institutes of apostolic life.

¹⁵ STEPHEN R. COVEY. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990, p. 122.

¹⁶ It is also common to call these dynamics "principles of government" and this is reflected in many constitutions of the institutes. I understand that the principles, while they are the origin and the goal, mark the actions and the dynamics and make the principles operational. It is true, however, that communion can be considered as a principle and dynamic at the same time.

turn, are inseparable: information, communion, participation, subsidiarity, and shared responsibility.

Governance has a globalizing, integrating, harmonizing, and dynamic function. It makes people grow and defines and promotes their rights. It puts the structures at the service of the mission. It links constellations of values and brings projects together. It implies interdisciplinarity. It rekindles charismatic inspiration and commemorates tradition in different contexts. Hence, the need to know how to position governance at its various levels - local, provincial and general - and their inherent processes. When there is a process, there is a project, there is intentionality and there is a direction in which incidents or gestures fit. There is programming in which the goals and times are clearly marked. The balance between centralization and decentralization is maintained, which passes through subsidiarity and decentralized coordination. It allows the ebb and flow from the center to the periphery and vice versa; from the top to the base and vice versa.

The traversing is made present in the pedagogy of governance and it is seen: 1) In the concern for focusing vocationally on people and bringing communities to the fullness of their evangelical life and to the full realization of the mission entrusted to them. It is, then, the pedagogy of intra-community and apostolic fidelity. 2) In keeping the animation chain active through the continuous and harmonious connection between the Superiors (general, provincial, and local). This animation supposes, at the same time, decentralized coordination through the balance between autonomy and dependence at all levels. 3) In wisely blending the indispensable double way of looking: a *long* view taking charge of the whole, the process and, above all, the great challenges; and the other *short* view which is the exercise of prudence when acting in each case or situation. The discernment of the calls of God in society, in the Church and in the congregation comes into play.

Governance is also a transversal axis, with an integrating approach, in the use of the means it utilizes: chapters, visits, circular letters, meetings, personal relationships, correspondence, etc. Keeping in mind that they are *means*, and not *ends*, and fitting them into a local, provincial or general plan. In a plan there is harmony and synchrony between all the means. When the plan is missing, it is likely that the governance is simply trying to fulfill *the requirements* or to *account for gestures*.

2. A Context of Great Challenges and Quite a few Opportunities

Every historical moment has its challenges. Ours is becoming excessively complex, due to very diverse factors, especially because it is in constant change and in constant transformation.¹⁷

a) Stimulating Challenges

¹⁷ Simply recall the writings of Gilles Lipovetsky, Edgar Morin, Manuel Castells, Daniel Innerarity, Byung-Cul or the Nobel prize winners José Saramago and Mario Vargas Llosa. The ecclesial documents on the synods, the encyclicals, and other documents of the ecclesial Magisterium tend to reflect the complexity in which we move. The general chapters, when making an analysis of reality, place their attention on the great challenges that their institutes experience. More directly about our subject, cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES. "El gobierno religioso ante los desafíos en el ámbito de la obediencia". CONFER 42 (2003) 389-405. Aa.Vv. "¿Cómo mejorar el gobierno?". VidRel 102 (2007) cuaderno 2.

At the beginning of the millennium, Daniel Innerarity made this analysis at the social level: "Society is *complex* due to the *appearance that it offers us* (heterogeneity, dissent, chaos, disorder, difference, ambivalence, fragmentation, and dispersion), *due to the feeling it produces* (non-transparency, uncertainty, and insecurity), and *due to what may or may not be done with it* (un-governability and immeasurability). As the new discourse about risk has warned, we have to get used to living in a world closer to chaos than to order and to conceive order as the continuation of chaos by other means. The dynamics of society threaten systemic risks that really affect us, but these causal chains are so complex, indirect, and opaque that they are very difficult to identify and combat. Complex systems are characterized precisely because they cannot control all the variables that are involved in it at the same time and in the same way. (...) Systems of high complexity have radically thrown into crisis the ideal that phenomena can be completely seen, understood, and managed."¹⁸

Although Daniel Innerarity affirms that what is alienated is not so much the subject as it is society, it is necessary to ask ourselves in the face of his suggestive and accurate analyzes, where is the personal and communal subject in this invisible society, whose new social magnitudes are: virtuality, exclusion, risk, opportunity, simulation, alternatives, representation, etc.? This same author starts another of his most recent books with these words: "The current world is full of paradoxes and a good part of them could be synthesized into the idea that it is a world of everybody and nobody. There is a proliferation of issues that belong to everybody (which affect us all and require coordinated actions), but of which, at the same time, no one can or wants to take charge (for which there is no competent body or of which nobody is made responsible). What is the difference between the common and the ungovernable, between shared responsibility and generalized irresponsibility? How can we distinguish between what belongs to everybody and to nobody or between what has no owner and what nobody cares about? Would we not be calling the emptiness universal and celebrating as an openness what in reality is out in the open and vulnerable?"¹⁹

b) Favorable Winds

The challenges are demanding, while at the same time they call us to fidelity to the gift of God. We move between recognition and boldness.

After careful observation of the facts of life in different continents, I have drawn this conclusion: *We live in an eclipse; it is not the sunset, nor the night. The dawn is coming!* There is another new religious life that appears on the horizon. In these fifty years the roots have been cultivated, the branches have been pruned, the leaves have fallen, but the tree of consecrated life, rooted in Christ, enjoys its vitality and will continue with other forms and other styles.²⁰

¹⁸ DANIEL INNERARITY, *La sociedad invisible*, Espasa, Madrid, 2004, pp. 14-16. I have italicized some words for emphasis.

¹⁹ DANIEL INNERARITY, *Un mundo de todos y de nadie. Piratas, riesgos y redes en el nuevo desorden global*, Paidós, Barcelona, 2013, p. 9.

²⁰ I like the image of Van Gogh's painting: *Small Pear Tree in Blossom*, in which some flowers bloom symbolizing hope. Cf. VÍCTOR HERRERO DE MIGUEL. *Aventuremos la vida. Invitaciones a la vida consagrada*. Madrid, PPC, 1915, p. 178. I also like to remember the passage of Jeremiah: "'What do you see, Jeremiah?' I replied: 'I see a branch

Governance unfolds today according to a new understanding of the person formed in relationship; according to the active conscience of the equality of rights and obligations; according to the positive assessment and respect for cultural and religious differences; according to horizons of universality and according to a strong sensitivity for the poor, those who suffer, and those who are excluded. There is special demand for certain values: the dignity of the person, freedom, justice, transparency, exemplariness, and solidarity. In the air there is a pre-eminence of encounter, dialogue, discernment and existential peripheries. The personalist anthropology is allowing for a model of humble leadership that is more human, authentic, and credible; leaders who illuminate, with their lifestyle, with their closeness and with their words, a distinct image from that which could suggest words such as command, order, direct, etc.

From a sociocultural point of view, we are living the new digital era. That, as we will see later, also brings new forms of relationships.

In the ecclesial sphere we have a very rich understanding of the Church as mystery, communion, and mission, in which the harmony between charisms and ministries and a strong missionary dynamic shine. In the Christian life, the model is not doctrine but rather faith in Jesus of Nazareth, who moved through this world doing good and offered us a new life. We are his disciples, his witnesses, and his missionaries. In this our Church we only understand power as service, but in the style of Jesus.²¹

Consecrated life in the post-conciliar period has made a journey between lights and shadows. The balance of the process of renewal is positive, both because of the self-understanding acquired (more charismatic, ecclesial, existential, prophetic, and eschatological) and because of its commitments to the missionary life of the Church and its qualified services to society. Consecrated people have a more global vision, take on and integrate cultural differences and are better prepared to go from one country to another. Solidarity has grown and the communication of goods has become more operational. The shared mission is growing.

c) Obstacles of Special Concern

What has been said does not blind us to the current evolution and the internal problems that we experience. The cry of the poor, of injustice and of the suffering of mother earth resounds in our ears. We know about the enrichment that the new vocations from different cultures bring, but it is difficult for us to follow the path of interculturality. The crossing of borders is difficult. Diversity maintains a pulse of strength with globalization. In Europe we live with some concern about the lack of vocations and the aging of those of us in consecrated life. This fact is calling for a restructuring of presences and services as a path of revitalization, regeneration, and missionary relaunching.

of the almond tree,' Then the Lord said to me: 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to carry it out.'" (Jer 1:11-12). God is a *blossoming almond tree*. Each flower is a light of his gaze. His gaze is like a beautiful flower that brightens the soul and ignites the heart. We ourselves are little lights and flowers placed in the world to illuminate and recreate it.

²¹ It is surprising, in a good way, that today those who talk about leadership in politics, business management, education or sports, choose the word "service" most commonly.

But the greatest challenge is to respond to the call to holiness, to follow Jesus and to recreate fraternal, active, and cheerful communities. *What life of faith*, what mystics with open eyes do we reveal when we do not walk in the presence of God or in the presence of our brothers and sisters?²² We live organized, we are competent, we are committed to social issues, but in the depths of ourselves we feel a certain mystic anemia, the fatigue of walking in faith and lifting our heads beyond what is being thrown at us. We have not eradicated the vices we inherited from these last two centuries. We are still very contaminated by *the Faustian culture* and the Promethean spirit. We nurture the culture of appearance and ambiguity. We are giving too much credit to the culture of emptiness, fragmentation, and alienation. We program for success, but we must integrate failure. Individualism stifles a common faith.

The *challenge of freedom* is strong. Sometimes self-esteem swells too much and everything revolves around the "me." In that way people are losing freedom. In our *communal life* we have been freeing ourselves from many ties: schedules, customs, prayers, prohibitions, etc. But we keep other ties intact: we have fallen into a misuse of time, an excessive reliance on digital media, an abuse of family relationships or friendships, an exaggerated cultivation of personal well-being and an attachment to the professional. With this, we refuse to be present to our brothers and sisters or we deprive them of our contribution or the help they need. The "crisis of the subject" is synonymous with giving way, of uprooting, which deteriorates fraternal life in community.

CICLSAL corroborates what I have said with this synthesis: "The consecrated life, characterized by the constant search for God and the constant re-visitation of its identity, breathes the demands and the cultural climate of this world which, having lost consciousness of God and of his effective presence throughout history, runs the risk of no longer recognizing itself. This is a time of not only of dis-enchantment, dis-agreement, and in-difference, but also of non-sense. For many, it is a time of confusion, they let themselves be overwhelmed by the search for the meaning of things, true spiritual castaways."²³

3. WHY TALK ABOUT LEADERSHIP TODAY?

1. *Something More Than a Change in Words*

We often hear that what we need most in our companies, institutions and communities are leaders who are contrasted with administrators or managers. Behind the novelty of the name (leadership), as I have already suggested, hides a new understanding of the function of governance.

It is true that the word "superior" does not sit well with new generations and that for many the word "leader" generates dissatisfaction. In fact, throughout history, many terms have been used

²² "Christians 'are, first of all, mystics with open eyes. Their mysticism is not a natural faceless mysticism. It is rather a mysticism that looks for a face, which leads to encounters with those who suffer, encounters with the face of unhappy people and victims. Open and vigilant eyes plot a revolt within us against the absurdity of innocent and unjust suffering; they arouse in us the hunger and thirst for justice, great justice for all, and keep us from orienting ourselves exclusively within the miniscule criteria of our world of mere needs.'" (J.B. METZ. *Mistica dagli occhi aperti. Per una spiritualità concreta e responsabile*. Brescia: Queriniana, 2011, p. 65), cited by CICLSAL, *Contemplate. To Consecrated Men and Women on the Trail of Beauty* (Oct 15, 2015), n. 58

²³ CICLSAL: *Contemplate*, no. 4.

to express the same service.²⁴ Superior is the person who governs a community. This is the meaning we want to maintain in this text.²⁵ The superior - the leader - is not the one who is highest, not the most distinguished, or the one who has the most power or prestige, but the one who serves.

There are more than 1,500 definitions that are thrown around about leadership. Under the name of leader are, at least, these characteristics: 1) The ability to observe the reality that surrounds them and have a great vision or plan for the future. Which means identifying the factors of change in which we move, redesigning processes, formulating strategies well, empowering different authorities, and promoting creativity. Leaders move forward. 2) The ability to motivate, guide and serve (an attitude of service). Leaders do not impose, they convince. The power of their convictions is greater than that of their title. 3) Generosity in service, consistency, conviction, audacity, and persuasive ability to achieve their objectives and carry out their proposals. To be models because of their integrity. 4) Innovation will be their permanent motivation. 5) They cannot lose their awareness of being members of the group they lead (participatory character). 6) Knowing how to evaluate frequently their personal life and the results achieved according to their proposed goals. Leaders begin again and keep the dream alive and the effort required to achieve the ends being pursued. In short, leaders are *men or women of proximity*. They get closer, they are interested, and they get involved.²⁶

[[1]]

The Church and consecrated life at this moment demand men and women who *speak with their whole lives*. People who speak with the charism of the Spirit and not only with the ability to elicit attention, attraction, admiration, and support. These characteristics are admirable and, if they have them, it is better for those who are called to build up the religious community. Religious

²⁴ Throughout history, there have been the names: abbot-abbess, prior-prioress, teacher, minister, custodian, guardian, corrector (minimum), prelate, head, head shepherd, servant, rector, director, superior, moderator, coordinator, inspector, chief, authority, and leader. Also, the communities have had different names: hermitage, abbey, monastery, convent, priory, school, home, residence, and center.

²⁵ In the Assembly of Superiors General held in November 1978, there was talk of *authority, obedience, and leadership*. Fr. Constantino Koser entitled his speech: “*El liderazgo del superior en un nuevo contexto de dificultades*” [*The Leadership of the Superior in a New Context of Difficulties*], VidRel, 46 (1979), pp. 59-57.

²⁶ Leadership research centers and the authors who have devoted themselves to writing on this topic are multiplying. I only make mention here of STEPHEN R. COVEY. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990; Id. *Principle-Centered Leadership*. New York City: Free Press, 1992; PETER DRUCKER. *Management in a Time of Great Change*. New York City: Truman Talley Books/Dutton, 1995; DANIEL GOLEMAN. *Emotional intelligence*. New York City: Bantam Books, 1995; DANIEL GOLEMAN-RICHARD BOYTZIS-ANNIE MCKEE. *Primal Leadership. Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002; JOSÉ MANUEL CASADO. *El directivo del siglo XXI*. Barcelona: Gestión 2000, 2000; ROBERT K. GREENLEAF. *Servant Leadership*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002. In the footnotes there will be other more current bibliographical references. In recent years, the Unions of Superiors General have spoken of leadership in several of their assemblies. The magazine *Vida Religiosa* dedicated a special issue to leadership: Aa.Vv. *Liderazgo para la reorganización*. VidRel 112 (2012) 240-320. On the leadership of Pope Francis, cf. CHRIS LOWNY, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, Chicago Illinois, Loyola Press, 2013; JEFFREY KRAMES. *Lead with Humility*. New York City: AMACOM, 2014.

leaders - the superiors - possessors of a founding charism, seek to adorn themselves with these qualities, not for personal gain, but to serve the community better.

Religious leaders must revive the vocational gift they have received and feel moved by the feelings of Christ.²⁷ Jesus teaches us to be leaders out of poverty and humility and by making apostolic community. The Father's will is his inspiration and his vision. His dynamic is compassion, communication and the crossing of borders ("moving to the other shore"). The Christian style of leadership, according to the Spirit, fosters smallness, assumes vulnerability, and lives the paschal mystery: in order to bring new life and so that others may have it in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). Far from withdrawing, Christian leadership is creative, enthusiastic, and corporate, just as Paul and the Founders lived it.

No wonder human relations experts say: "*Leaders don't command, they inspire growth, ingenuity and collaboration.*"²⁸ Leadership styles and profiles have developed progressively according to circumstances. There is no perfect person with all the qualities that are often assigned to the figure of the leader. There are people who can exercise leadership in one sphere, in one area, and, in other spheres and areas, go unnoticed. The styles change according to the social, cultural, religious, and economic contexts. Looking at the passage of time makes us think of 1) the leadership of the boss who offered security and asked for loyalty, 2) the leadership of the one who offered prosperity and wellbeing, 3) the leadership of the organizer who promoted belonging and group dynamics, 4) the leadership of innovation in presences, means and methods, 5) the leadership of communication, which is the person who best processes information, interprets it most intelligently and uses it the most inspiring and creative way.

2. *Redefine, Innovate and Transform*

Three words that evoke the same amount of aspirations about consecrated life at this moment. Anyone who examines language in the life of the Church and, more specifically, in religious life finds a moving, changing, provocative language. There are those who show their discomfort about the use and abuse of new words. In some cases, the negative reaction may be justified because there are manipulative expressions, but authentic language refers us to our condition of being in relationship with our structure for dialogue and our personal fulfillment.

We forget that words reflect our richest sensitivity and are expressions of feelings and aspirations. Without realizing it, we are fostering extensive, interactive, and intensive relationships. Language leads us to give meaning, to understand ourselves and to be creative. Words are not only sounds, *flatus vocis*, but also the revelation of an intentionality.

²⁷ JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES. "El liderazgo en el Espíritu, perspectiva antropológica, teológica y metodológica". In: *La vida consagrada: Epifanía del amor de Dios en el mundo*, XVII Jornadas agustinianas. Madrid: Centro Teológico de San Agustín, 2015, pp. 165-188; ASUNCIÓN CODES. *Un liderazgo con Espíritu*. Encuentro de la UISG, 13 de marzo de 2014.

²⁸ This comes from the title of JORGE CUERVO's book, *Leaders Don't Command: Inspire Growth, Ingenuity, and Collaboration*. Viva Books Private Limited, 2017. To lead is to allow oneself to be guided by the Spirit and to create spaces of expression and decision making for one's brothers and sisters. Not everything is calculated and measured. To lead is to be open to surprises.

Words that are used little or that have a new meaning are a reflection of the processes and contexts in which they live. I give an example taken from current language. We have been using words that begin with *re-* (renew, revitalize, reestablish, regenerate, reorganize, restructure, redefine);²⁹ or those that start with *in-* or *un-* (insertion, inculturation, unbelief, innovation, inclusion); those who start with *con-* or *co-* (convocation, concreteness, coexistence, consistency, concelebration, compassion, condolence, commitment); or those that start with *inter-* (intercultural, interreligious, interconfessional, intergenerational, interprovincial, intercongregational). These words, as well as charism, prophecy, eschatology, communion, ecology, paradigm, etc., have been indicative of fidelity to God and to man throughout these last fifty years. They have been used periodically in the renewal process and have been red flags on the journey. The phases of vitality and fatigue will happen and the leader must be attentive and discern the situations in order to keep consciences and responsibility for growth alive, which is proper to life.

Today the one who governs feels urged to empower the actions and processes where these three verbs are hidden: *redefine, innovate, and transform*.

Questions that are reiterated, and no less fruitful, are: How *to give meaning to* what we are in a secular world? What face and what presence do we offer as passionate followers of the poor, chaste, and obedient Jesus? What are our communities models for? Those who observe us lament that we have lost significance and, hence, that we no longer evoke transcendence and parousia. We have stopped being the "helpful shock" and the apocalyptic prod.³⁰ They still don't recognize us as "*evangelica testificatio*." And we don't succeed in showing the flame that burns within us, nor the fresh water of hope that springs forth from our communities. Hence there is the need to *redefine* our life in order to *be the light of the world, salt of the earth and leaven in the dough*.

Innovation is linked to *processes of newness*.³¹ Consecrated life in the history of the Church has always been innovative, proposing different alternatives of consecrated life and offering cutting-edge evangelizing structures and means. Those who reach a profound experience of the Spirit always lead to innovation. They are bold and creative. They try to extend creation. They do not underestimate what exists; they do not conform to the "status quo"; they reject routine and take steps to overcome it and move forward.

The Spirit leads consecrated persons to offer the best of themselves in order to live the mission they have received with joy. Being a Spirit of communion, it urges us to resolve the oppositions and struggles that make our pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem barren. Reciprocal love - relying on all the charisms and ministries - beautifies harmony. Innovation begins with listening

²⁹ For being the most used "re-". If it evokes the past, it is to get a glimpse of the future; it is a springboard for something different and of higher quality.

³⁰ Cf. JOHANN BAPTIST METZ, *Las órdenes religiosas. Su misión en un futuro próximo como testimonio vivo del seguimiento de Cristo*, Herder, Barcelona, 1978, pp. 13ff.

³¹ On the principle of innovation, cf. FRANCISCO MENCHÉN BELLÓN. *La creatividad y las nuevas tecnologías en las organizaciones modernas*. Madrid: Díaz de Santos, 2009, pp. 89ff. Although, for us Christians and religious, innovation follows the law of the incarnation: the new life offered by the Son of God made man. "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). The Spirit dwells in us, he is the Lord and giver of life and continues to make all things new.

to the Word and discerning the signs of the times; in communal thinking and feeling looking towards higher goals in spirituality and mission. Innovation makes us enter into vocational, formative, missionary and, consequently, organizational processes, in which works are at the service of people and evangelization. Innovation is proposed by Jesus in the parable of new wine in new wineskins (cf. Mk 2:22).

There are challenges, with different tones and from different angles that ask for our *transformation*. This transformation affects the *thoughts*, the *attitudes*, and the *commitments*. Thinking about the world, thinking about life; thinking about our world and our life, is not a sport, but rather a requirement for survival. Doesn't superficiality and routine tire us? Why do we abhor the ultimate questions about the meaning of our life, our consecration, our living in community, and our habitual apostolic services?

The transformation of our *attitudes* or habitual behavior is marked by confrontation with the Beatitudes, which are the basic attitudes of Christians and men and women religious. The transformation of our commitments is the *pastoral conversion* of which the conference of CELAM in Aparecida (2007) spoke and that the Synod on the New Evangelization (2012) reminded us. Pope Francis speaks to us of the Church's missionary transformation and of pastoral conversion.

Leadership is creative and effective when it helps to transform minds and hearts, and sets people in motion following Jesus and announcing the Gospel of the Kingdom. This is only achieved in a theological climate and in the Eucharist, a sphere of renewal of the Covenant and of authentic transformation. Our consecrated life takes place in "epiclesis". The Holy Spirit is the one who transforms and sanctifies. In that way we are made Eucharist and, from it, the other transformations of our communities and our works gain meaning.

When you think about transforming leadership from the perspective of faith, the first thing is not to act, but to let oneself be;³² available and open to gratuitousness that others bring. From this attitude comes sharing, doing with others. The Eucharistic community is a reality, it is a task and a goal. It is a school for the mission, where you have to unlearn self-referentiality and go forth.

3. Focus Attention on the Person and the Communities

Given the obstacles I have indicated that create special concern, it is obvious that leaders should focus their attention on centering people on their vocation and revitalizing their communities. We have a good percentage of members with crises of roots and meaning, people who live as if they were floating, disoriented on the inside. They stand like posts on which you can hang any announcement or sign, but they do not have roots like trees. A tree differs from a post because it is alive and is nourished from its roots. When a community encounters one or some of its members in this situation, the service of governance becomes very difficult. For these types of people, nothing fazes them or everything is relativized. Neither the poor nor the excluded speak to them, nor do they care about the sick or the elderly. Their crisis affects the whole community,

³² Leadership, in the areas of society, business, politics, education and sports, is primarily active leadership. First is action, although leaders know that they have to "pensarse" [personally ponder] (reflection-action) and they also have to "pensarnos" [ponder with others]. In the Christian life, in the Church and in consecrated life, the leader is sent to be one with the others. Their action starts from a shared grace.

which sees their interest weaken and fall apart for listening to the Word, sharing the faith, discerning the signs of the times, being together, and revitalizing apostolic commitments.

Leaders direct people, not things, numbers, or programs. If the greatest crisis we have is our foundation, their approach must be sensitive, careful, and accompanying. Jesus is a model with the two from Emmaus. He regenerates hope (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Hence the need to come closer, with eyes wide open, with attentive ears, with a compassionate heart and with active hope. Those disciples discover the risen Jesus in the breaking of bread and return with joy to the community. They recover their belonging from their encounter with the living Christ. The paschal journey is the basis for the recovery of identity, belonging, and availability of people and communities.³³

4. PROXIMITY AND PRESENCE

"Leadership and proximity" in consecrated life is a subject that goes beyond the great interest that the words can arouse. Today it is obligatory because there is no true leadership from a distance or from otherness marked by differences. It is only possible from proximity and presence. Hence the importance of reflecting on this issue when dealing with the renewal of the governance of the Institutes. Our leader, the true leader, is Jesus of Nazareth, presence of divine mercy and consummate master of service. He, sent by the Father and filled with the Holy Spirit, "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance" (Phil 2:7). By his incarnation, word, death and resurrection we experience true proximity, that is, the saving presence of Jesus. In Jesus the two great aspects of the presence of God in the people of Israel meet: the covenant and the temple. His blood shed is the "new covenant" (cf. Lk 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25) and He is the "new Temple," not made by men (cf. Jn 2:21). Jesus reveals the Father and becomes a redemptive presence for all humankind through the Spirit. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). The Angel greets Mary as full of grace, and adds: "The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). The entire New Testament is the gospel of proximity. If Jesus is our model for leadership and for proximity, everything else is simply explanations or clarifications because consecrated life is governed in docility to the Spirit of Jesus.³⁴

By using the category "proximity," the assumptions of mere space and time and the inclination to understand it as "desire for union" are reduced in importance. That is to say, that eagerness to "bind ourselves" where the "I" and the "thou" are diluted. Only when "closeness" and "distance" are brought together does presence come and this is genuine proximity. We have each been created distinctly and each of us has our own space to grow. It is the Spirit that makes us partakers of harmony. "The more I wish to unite myself to a reality, the more I must respect what it is and what it is called to be. Respect prevents subjugation and fusion. It places us at the right distance to know and love: to be close at a certain distance. By uniting both relationships, a *space of freedom*, of *free play* is established, in which a superior form of immediacy is gained, a higher

³³ Two references on communal and missionary revitalization: LUIS A. GONZÁLEZ DÍEZ. "Recrear la visión para conquistar la comunidad". VidRel 118 (2015) 231-250; JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES. "¿Cómo se forma una comunidad? ¿Cómo queda configurada por la misión?". VidRel 118 (2015) 251-271.

³⁴ Cf. JOËLLE FERRY. «Gouverner dans L'Esprit. Le service d'autorité, un lieu de conversion». Christus 246 (2015) 182-189.

way of being close to something: it is *integration*, the *exchange of possibilities*. This exchange is precisely *presence*.”³⁵

Thinking about the current moment of consecrated life and the need to provide quality governance, it seemed more opportune to focus our attention on presence than on *proximity*. Two reasons led me to this: 1) The wealth that this word contains within it. The proximity of God to his people becomes his presence.³⁶ 2) Because it makes us to be in tune with the tradition and the teaching of the Church when asking superiors for their presence in their communities. I will give explanations of these points later.

Today consecrated life, with all the mystery, communion, and mission that it entails, becomes expressive through the categories highlighted by philosophers of the personalist movement. Marcel constantly referred to the mystery and highlighted the quality of presence, and Levinas highlighted the anthropological value of *proximity*, a philosophical category full of suggestions for those who live together and have a common project. As well as for those who are serving in the midst of the community because it makes them be aware of the other, not out of their initiative, but because the other is presented to them and makes them forget about themselves. It is like making them enter - get involved - into an intimate compassionate solidarity. The parable of the Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) is for us, Christians and men and women religious, a paradigm of *proximity*, of *accompaniment*.³⁷

The grammar of proximity inspires ways and manners of expressing personal relationships through verbs, names, pronouns, prepositions, etc. The search, the request, the cry, and the question all lead to dialogue. "Hence, language, before being the house of being, as Heidegger wanted, is the house of mankind."³⁸ A true teacher of the grammar of proximity is Pope Francis, who speaks with his entire life. "Bergoglio 'inhabits' the words he speaks. Just like he does not want to live alone, but rather needs a community, so his words need to make room for whoever is in front of him. They are never pronounced simply because of their beauty, but because of their capacity to create an evangelical relationship."³⁹ For some years, due to the influence of sociology, we have been using the word *solidarity* more than *fraternity*. Today we emphasize, without losing

³⁵ ALFONSO LÓPEZ QUINTÁS. *Inteligencia creativa. El descubrimiento personal de los valores*. Madrid: BAC, 2002, p. 165.

³⁶ "Where is the proximity of the Lord made presence? Where someone loves and, like Jesus, exists for others, because there temporary proximity is overcome. Hence, proximity is, first and foremost, personal, not temporary." ANTON GRABNER-HAIDER. «Proximidad». In: *Vocabulario práctico de la Biblia*. Barcelona: Herder, 1975.

³⁷ When Cardinal Bergoglio made comments on the parable of the Good Samaritan, he put special accent on the verbs: "Came upon him", "was moved with compassion" and "approached the victim". Then comes what he did: "Bandaged" the wounds, "poured" oil and wine, "lifted him" up on the horse, "took" him to the inn and "cared" for him (Lk 10:33-36). "Accompaniment is the setting that is needed so that the Word, justice, and love can be proclaimed, in such a way that it finds an answer of faith. Encounter, conversion, communion, and solidarity are categories that make accompaniment explicit, as a concrete criterion of the gospel that opposes the guidelines of an abstract or merely spiritual ethic." Closing homily of the *Congreso Social de la Iglesia*, Rosario, May 8, 2011.

³⁸ JOSEP MARÍA ESQUIROL. *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad*. Barcelona: Acantilado, 2015, p. 138. In Western monasticism *eschatology and grammar are intimately linked*, said Jean Leclercq and Benedict XVI reminded us of it in the Collège des Bernardins. *Address to the Representatives of the World of Culture*, Paris, Sept. 12, 2008.

³⁹ ANTONIO SPADARO. *El sueño del papa Francisco. El rostro futuro de la Iglesia*. Madrid: PCI, 2013, p. 32.

sight of the rich content of both, *proximity*. Fraternity, already in the Greco-Roman culture, evoked ties of blood, of country and religion. Jesus reveals the Father to us and affirms that we are all brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 23:8). Even the French Revolution keeps fraternity as one of its three great words. The growth of sensitivity towards the poor and the weak stirs up compassion and sharing. The journey of *proximity* begins.

At the World Congress on Consecrated Life, held in Rome in 2004, there was talk of a Samaritan life supported by two icons: the Samaritan woman and the Samaritan man. By evoking the figure of the Samaritan man, it was said in the working document: "To be a neighbor means to see situations from the perspective of the poor person who is the lowest (eschaton) in society and the determining criterion in the Final Judgment (Mt 25:31-45); from their demands and from their process of healing and liberation. The main challenge today consists in changing priorities to promote the dynamics of compassionate proximity."⁴⁰

Our Pope Francis often speaks of proximity in society and in the Church with connotations to openness (of the senses and of the heart),⁴¹ to gratuity, to encounter, to recognition, to tenderness, to compassion and to getting involved.⁴² But he reveals and authenticates proximity when he refers to the total surrender of oneself.

We will see later how proximity and presence are intertwined.

⁴⁰ USG-UISG. *Pasión por Cristo, pasión por la humanidad*, Congreso internacional de la vida consagrada. Madrid: PCI, 2005, p. 54. [International Congress on Consecrated Life, *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity*. Pauline Books & Media, 2005.]

⁴¹ "We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur" (EG 171).

⁴² Cf. *General audience* of March 4, 2015

PART TWO

THE VALUE OF PRESENCE

*“I shall walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.”
(Ps 116:9)*

1. A VERY ANCIENT NORM IN THE CHURCH AND ITS BACKGROUND

The Church, throughout history, has had residence requirements for bishops and pastors, abbots in monasteries and superiors in communities. They are based on the mission of service that they owe to their brothers and sisters. *Presence*, therefore, has a lot to do with *memory, attention, and care*. The post-conciliar Magisterium has insisted on the presence of superiors.⁴³ I highlight one of the most recent declarations.

*“The service of authority demands a persevering presence, able to enliven and take initiative, to recall the raison d'être of consecrated life, to help the persons entrusted to you to correspond with ever-renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit.”*⁴⁴

Leading a community involves constant personal interaction. This requires of the one who leads innate or acquired qualities. The *presence* of leaders - superiors - is a determining factor in community life. But let us understand it well, because presence cannot be reduced to merely "being there," physically together with others, or simply the obligation of residing in the house. *Knowing to be, where to be* and how to be is something that, if you are not born with a certain instinct for it, you have to train yourself and learn it.

The mission entrusted to leaders comes to them wrapped in mediations. They are asked to serve their brothers and sisters *in* and *from* the presence of the Lord. This service knows a lot about gratuitousness, emptying, generosity, honesty, and exemplariness. Rethinking governance from the perspective of "presence" invites us to be attentive to combine the two keys in which religious governance unfolds: the vertical (gratuitousness) and the horizontal (generosity). In fact, when we speak today of charismatic revitalization in the institutes, we are trying to position people in this double axis to achieve coherence between the call and the response. It is living the covenant. And, when we talk about regenerating governance, we have to evaluate presence. But how is this presence to be understood?

2. OUR TIME, A TIME OF PRESENCE

Our time is a time of presence, be it real or virtual, physical or moral, active, passive or interactive. We need to be listening, talking, and watching. It is a time of immediacy and communion, in short, of proximity. This invites us to clarify what presence means when speaking with depth about the presence of leaders – superiors - in the community (local, provincial or general). Governance in religious life is not done from a distance, but rather from presence, which can be immediate, physical; or indirect, through vicars or delegates. We still need to define the reach that is given to communication technology.

When we realize that God dwells within us, we truly begin to renew ourselves. The security of the gifts received in our brothers and sisters leads us to adoration and praise. It gives us strength to be always raising our hands, pointing towards the One to whom we are going and from whom we receive communion with our brothers and sisters. And, when we speak of human presence, we

⁴³ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, c. 629 ET, 25; EE, 30; FLC, 48; SaC, 14; SAO, 13, a; 20, a.

⁴⁴ SAO 13, a.

get a glimpse of the immense wealth of the person who is present and enters into relationship with others.

We are used to reflecting on the presence of God the creator; of Jesus, the Savior, and of the Holy Spirit, Lord, and giver of life. We evoke the presence of God in the world and in history, in the personal life of the believer and of the Christian community. It is the area in which we, consciously or unconsciously, move, think, plan and decide. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Pope Francis comments: "God's presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice. This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered. God does not hide himself from those who seek him with a sincere heart, even though they do so tentatively, in a vague and haphazard manner."⁴⁵

1. The Person, a Burning Presence

In speaking of human presence, we can go down two paths: one through faith and Christian mysticism and the other through existential analysis. The two converge. The faith that we profess, the life project that we assume, reveals to us the person as an image of God, an image of the Trinity, which in us and through us becomes present and we make ourselves present to each other in fraternity. The divine presence in us is experienced as a gift. Because God loves us, we are able to turn to Him with confidence. Humans are made to give themselves away. Their presence is like a little light of the divine presence shining in the world. "For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light, we see light" (Ps 36:10). It is light that is given. Some people hide it and it does not shine. Some people put it on a lamp stand and it shines. We are born to shine, to reveal the glory of God.

Existential analysis, through personal experiences, makes us move from "there is" to "I give."⁴⁶ As we will see, it is in the *personal encounter* where it is most noticeable; where presence becomes a gift. "The Thou meets me through grace — it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed the act of my being. (...) I become through, my relation to the Thou; as I become, I say Thou."⁴⁷ This is how many other thinkers of our time express themselves with different nuances, considerations based on the existential experience.

a) The Mysterious Presence of the Person

I start with three reference points when explaining the person as a presence and then add some testimonies of the personalist movement.

1) Saint Augustine was a teacher of those who wanted to travel the path of interiority and communion of presence. In *Confessions* he opened a path of profound knowledge of the human

⁴⁵ *Evangelii gaudium*, 71.

⁴⁶ Cf. CARLOS DÍAZ. *Del hay al doy. ¡Ay, si nadie diera! (La urgencia de la gratuidad)*. Salamanca: San Esteban, 2013; FRANCESC TORRALBA. *La lógica del don*. Zaragoza: Khaf, 2012; XOSÉ MANUEL DOMINGUEZ PRIETO. *Antropología de la familia*. Madrid: BAC, 2007, pp. 11-40.

⁴⁷ MARTIN BUBER. *Yo y Tú*. Madrid: Caparrós, 1993, p. 17. [For English Translation see MARTIN BUBER, *I and Thou*, 1923, Blurb, San Francisco, Ca., 2018]

being, before whom he feels amazed by how mysterious it is. Analyzing in himself the restlessness, the searching, the consciousness of being, the memory of oneself and the weight of love, he ends up offering us his deep sense of the identity of the person and of fraternal communion. Saint Augustine, an expert in turning towards himself, towards the interior of himself, does not promote a sterile solitude. The God that is reflected in his interior is the same for all souls. Finding God is finding the one who is truth and life for all others. "Your soul is not your own, but is shared by all the brethren whose souls are also yours, or, rather, whose souls form with yours not souls, but one soul, the single soul of Christ."⁴⁸ His path to the interior is a continuous exercise of transcendence. The human presence, according to this belief, in Saint Augustine becomes "communion" that has its expressions in words, gestures, and external acts.

2) For Gabriel Marcel, the person is not a problem; he or she is a mystery. He gave human experience ontological weight. He also analyzed its existential experience and reflected on its inner map. A problem is something before which I find myself and a mystery is something in which my own being is involved and committed. In the face of a problem we are spectators and, in a mystery, we are actors. Marcel speaks of presence according to the analysis of the situation in which two people find themselves, who may be communicating, but there is no communion between them and they end up as strangers and unrecognizable. "By a very singular phenomenon indeed, this stranger interposes himself between me and my own reality, he makes me in some sense also a stranger to myself; I am not really myself while I am with him. The opposite phenomenon, however, can also take place. When somebody's presence does really make itself felt, it can refresh my inner being; it reveals me to myself, it makes me more fully myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact."⁴⁹ Presence, according to him, only occurs in the emptying of oneself and in recollection. It is in recollection where the person recovers inner unity and finds the foundation of his relationship with others.

3) Xavier Zubiri, in various writings, affirms that the person is actual, that is, presence from himself because he is real. "Actuality is nothing but being present by one's own self-will. And reciprocally, being present by one's own self-will is to be present because one is real. All that is real, being real, is something actual, is something that is actually present."⁵⁰

May we allow that *being present from oneself* to resonate and let us contrast it with that being present *from the function*, from the position, from the assignment, which is what appearance offers us.

⁴⁸ Saint Augustine, *Letters* 243, 4. (Translator's note: This quote can be found at https://archive.org/stream/fathersofthechurch027568mbp/fathersofthechurch027568mbp_djvu.txt)

⁴⁹ GABRIEL MARCEL. *El misterio del ser*. In: *Obras completas*, I. Madrid: BAC, 2002, pp. 185-186. (Translator's note: This quote can be found at https://archive.org/stream/themysteryofbeing00marcuoft/https://archive.org/stream/themysteryofbeing00marcuoft_djvu.txt) See also GABRIEL MARCEL, *The Mystery of Being*, 1951, Andesite Press, 2017.

⁵⁰ X. ZUBIRI. *Espacio. Tiempo. Materia*. Madrid, 2008, p. 366. Cf. *Inteligencia sentiente*. Madrid, 1980; *El hombre y Dios*. Madrid, 1984. [See also <http://www.zubiri.org/works/englishworks/si/Sentientintelligence.pdf>; See *Sentient Intelligence*, translated with notes and introduction by Thomas B. Fowler, Sc.D., The Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America, Washington, DC, 1999. See *Man and God*, UPA Publisher, 2009.]

But who has not had sensations, perceptions from the heart and spiritual harmony, which were not rationally formulated? They are the radiations of presence in the affective, religious, aesthetic, and ethical fields. Therefore, the philosophy of the spirit and personalism offer solid foundations for speaking of the person as a mysterious presence.⁵¹ Man is a mystery to himself. It is a reality that neither the intelligence nor the heart can comprehend completely because they are continually referring to another supreme and incomprehensible reality. Man is the being that questions and goes beyond himself and his environment. He is interpellation. Mounier said: "The value of a mystery is not its opaqueness, as is believed, often for and against it, but because it is the diffuse sign of a reality richer than clarities overly immediate. Its dignity is completely in its diffuse positivity, in the presence it announces. It is not strong enough to be a safe from danger."⁵² The person participates in this mysterious condition not only for himself, but also for others.

The person, within this sphere of mystery, is a personalized presence. It is spiritual and a guarantee of unity, always open, both to the infinite presence and to all human presence.⁵³ Buber, Levinas and the entire dialogic school of thought emphasize the relationship, reciprocity, and encounter.⁵⁴ It is based on the mutual giving of presence. The other is introduced to me, affects me and is an event in my life. This is the deepest sense of "proximity" in Levinas.⁵⁵ The free offering of the other allows mutual belief, fellowship and solidarity or effective commitment. Personal interrelation is fruitful. When we open ourselves and give of ourselves to the other, we become richer. Growing and improving depend on everyone because encounter implies responsibility.

b) Presence and Encounter

Recognition is on the rise for the values of openness, dialogue, solidarity, and commitment. From the analysis of the experience of the other, we have moved to putting the emphasis on what

⁵¹ Let us recall P. Wust, F. Ebner, M. Buber, Luis Lavelle, G. Marcel, Manuel Mounier, E. Levinas, F. Rosenzweig, X. Zubiri, Lain Entralgo, A. López Quintás, M. Besabe, J. Martín Velasco, C. Díaz, X.M. Domínguez, etc.

⁵² E. MOUNIER. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1992, p. 203.

⁵³ Cf. ALBERTO BASABE MARTÍN, *o. c.*, pp. 40, 41, 48, 81.

⁵⁴ The one who has probably spoken most broadly and deeply about personal encounter has been PEDRO LAÍN ENTRALGO in his work: *Teoría y realidad del otro*. Madrid: Alianza/Universidad, 1983.

⁵⁵ "Proximity is not intentionality. To be in the presence of something is not to open it to oneself, and aim at it thus disclosed, nor even to 'fulfill' by intuition the 'signitive thought' that aims at it and always ascribes a meaning to it which the subject bears in itself. To approach is to touch the neighbor, beyond the data apprehended at a distance in cognition, that is, to approach the other. This turning of the given into a neighbor and of the representation into a contact, of knowledge into ethics, is the human face and skin. The caress is dormant in sensorial or verbal contact; in the caress proximity signifies: to languish in the presence of the neighbor as though his proximity and vicinity were also an absence (...) The neighbor, this face and this skin in the trace of this absence, and consequently, in their distress as forsaken, and in their unimpeachable right over me, with an obsession irreducible to consciousness, which has not begun in my freedom. Am I in my egoness qua I anything but a hostage?" EMMANUEL LEVINAS. *Descubriendo la existencia con Husserl y Heidegger*. Madrid: Síntesis, 2005, p. 333 [For English version see EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1987.]; *De otro modo que ser, o más allá de la esencia*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1987, pp. 140-162. See also, *Alteridad y trascendencia*. Madrid: Arena Libros, 2014, pp. 79-86, 101-110. Etienne Feron maintains that Levinas, when speaking of proximity, moves in the metaphysics of presence (in his work *De l'idée de transcendance à la question de langage*). The truth is that he has defined presence "as an exposition in the absolute frankness of being, which also signifies gathering and synchrony without flaw...and added as if nothing of the past and the future (which are the temporal failures of presence...), evasion, or shadow...", cf. E. LEVINAS. *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Edited by A.T. Peperzak, S. Critchley, R. Bernasconi, Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996, p. 151.

is the experience *with* the other.⁵⁶ Underlying this is the culture of relationship, reference to communion, exchange, and complementarity. This makes us *go out* of our little inner world and leads us to recognize the values of men and women, to know how to share and organize ourselves in another way. Within this culture of the relationship, the value of the *personal encounter* as a presence of creative communion is emphasized. The category "encounter" is a constant reference point to define the human being as an *open and syntactic reality; intersubjective and dialogical*. To live is to live together. Finding oneself is something more than being in proximity, juxtaposing oneself, clashing, controlling oneself, and managing oneself. To find oneself means to glimpse the area of one's own life with that of another reality that reacts actively to my presence. To find oneself is to be present, in the creative sense of exchanging possibilities of one order and another. "The true ideal of the human being is to create valuable forms of unity. For that reason, it can be affirmed, with reason, that there is nothing that unites us like doing well together".⁵⁷

Peter Wust thinks that the full understanding of the insertion of the person in the world supposes an analysis of categories such as immediacy, distance, and presence. Human presence is fully revealed in the personal encounter. Even more: "All real life is encounter."⁵⁸ Man, who is a being of encounters, has many relationships with things and with his peers, but not all of them have the same depth. The person knows of coexistence, of "being-with others" and of forming a "we", which becomes a living word.⁵⁹ The person is inaccessible intimacy, but the I-Thou relationship affects us and puts our own freedom at stake. Our receptiveness is reciprocated without nullifying resistance to any attempt at fusion or possession and domination.

There is no possibility of encounter when others are considered as *obstacles*, as *instruments* or as *nobody*. Only when they are considered as people and openness, gratuity, availability and acceptance are encouraged before them. The encounter takes place in a common sphere of being in which, at the same time, the requirement and mutual recognition concur; the giving and the receiving. The call and the answer, the interpellation and the consent meet and intertwine; the word, the reason for living, and the common project are shared. Three prepositions, which I take from Laín Entralgo, connect presence and encounter: *in, towards, and for*. That area of "in" is that of belief, as the basic structure of every relationship: believing in the other; the "towards" is the

⁵⁶ M. MOUNIER says: "I only exist to the extent that I exist for others and ultimately to be is to love." in: *Obras Completas*, Vol. III. Salamanca, 1990, p. 475. E. LEVINAS emphasizes that the face of the other does not initiate an ontological discourse, which leads to consider it as neutral, but rather an ethical discourse, that is, that the expression of the other leads us to the participation with it. Cf. *Totalidad e infinito*, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁷ ALFONSO LÓPEZ QUINTÁS. *Inteligencia creativa. El descubrimiento personal de los valores*. Madrid: BAC, 1999, pp. 176; Id. *El secreto de una vida lograda*. Madrid: Palabra, 2003; Id. *Llamados al encuentro*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2011. And in other works, he has dealt with the theme of encounter and presence.

⁵⁸ MARTIN BUBER. *Yo y Tú*. Madrid: Caparrós, 1993, p. 17 [For English Translation see MARTIN BUBER, *I and Thou*, 1923, Blurb, San Francisco, CA., 2018.]; cf. also J. ROF CARBALLO. *El hombre como encuentro*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1973. E. LEVINAS expounds on this idea: the entire form of true expression has the form of an encounter with the other, which is an ethical encounter. The "face" is the form that the other takes in the encounter, where they open themselves up to responsibility. Cf. *De otro modo que ser, o más allá de la esencia*, Sígueme, Salamanca, 1987, p. 150.

⁵⁹ Cf. P. LAÍN ENTRALGO, *o. c.*, p. 327. The poet PEDRO SALINAS made a beautiful song to the dialogue between the "you" and the "me". At one point he says: "What highest joy: / to live in the pronouns!", *La voz a ti debida*, Clásicos Castalia, Madrid, 1986, p. 64.

hopeful projection and the "for" is the good, the love, which is a donation without expecting anything in return.

In the encounter there is mutual enlightenment and personal enrichment. "That's when the miracle of the 'we' occurs: the other is not something that happens in your life, but something that 'happens' to you. It's not just before you, but rather it is a *call* for you. Its presence touches you in your depths. Therefore, many times, the presence of the other, even if you like it, also makes you uncomfortable, since it is an invitation to let yourself be dethroned. The presence of the other, of this 'thou' with which, perhaps, you form a we, gives you an important first lesson: it shows you that you are not the center of the universe."⁶⁰ Thus, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) begins to be paradigmatic of the encounter with the other, where accompaniment, compassion, mercy and charity (the love for others) occur together.⁶¹

The encounter acquires a supreme form of expression when God is Thou. The human presence implies an experience of God. Man seeks God because he has been encountered before and speaks with God because he has spoken to him before. The person making their life either reflects or hides God in it.

2. *Virtual Presence*

a) The Impact of the Virtual

We are used to thinking about presence in space-time and physical coordinates. But we are in a new era of continuous and diffuse cultural mutation induced by the new information and communication technologies (ICT). We have gone from the industrial age to the digital age. But with a surprisingly qualitative leap. There is no comparison of one revolution to another. ICTs have made electronic space possible with a multitude of new social spaces. "This new capacity for free expression and free movement of information has generated the rich virtual landscape we know today."⁶² It affects all areas of information, communication, cultural development, education, economics, and politics. It has an impact on the spheres of knowledge and emotions and affection.⁶³ They are changing our perceptions and relationships, as well as our privacy and security.

⁶⁰ XOSÉ MANUEL DOMÍNGUEZ PRIETO. *Eres luz. La alegría de ser persona*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2005, p. 77.

⁶¹ ALFONSO LÓPEZ QUINTÁS, points out nine requirements and characteristics of encounter: 1) generosity, 2) respect and collaboration, 3) availability and sympathy, 4) trust and truth, 5) attitude of gratitude, 6) fidelity and patience, 7) simplicity, 8) cordiality, 9) the exercise of imagination and joint participation in relevant activities. In *El secreto de una vida lograda*. Madrid: Palabra, 2003, pp. 110-122.

⁶² ERIC SCHMIDT-JARED COHEN. *El futuro digital*. Madrid: Ediciones Anaya, 2014, p. 17. [For English Edition see ERIC SCHMIDT and JARED COHEN. *The New Digital Age: Transforming Nations, Businesses, and Our Lives*. Kindle Edition. Vintage; New York, 2013.]

⁶³ ULTRICH BECK and ELISABETH BECK-GERNSHEIM analyze the types of long-distance relationships and how new forms of communication allow affective relationships to be maintained and consolidated. The many factors that influence the relationships of people who emigrate seeking better living conditions or seek political asylum, make them wonder: How much distance, how much closeness can love tolerate? See their book: *Distant Love: Personal Life in the Global Age*. Polity Press, Malden, MA; 2014.

The new technologies have the characteristics of immateriality, interactivity, instantaneousness, innovation, and possibilities of improving the image and the sound and the interconnection. Through them a new way of understanding *presence* has emerged, which is not only physical, but also virtual.⁶⁴ A person can *make themselves present* to another in both ways, with their commonalities and their differences. The difficulty is to agree on what is virtual and what is its scope, because as experts say, on the one hand, definitions are very ambiguous and, on the other, the virtual world is emerging with such force that it escapes all precision. We have not done more than pull at the tip of the ball of yarn. Either way, "digital media are not doors out of reality, but rather 'prostheses', extensions capable of enriching our ability to live relationships and exchange information."⁶⁵

In this digital age we live in permanent chiaroscuro. Light and darkness go hand in hand and intertwine.⁶⁶ Opportunities and risks are intertwined. Words acquire meanings according to the light that is projected on them. *Presence, proximity, and community* have a diverse coloring in the real world and the virtual world. Therefore, we must be careful not to get lost in the words.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing is the progressive advance of the globalization of relationships, since space and time are compressed into the instant and the immediate. Some people think that the social change created by the web, albeit in a diffuse way, is leading to the recognition that "to be is to share" and that in the digital era individualism is being overcome, because we are all knots making up a net.⁶⁷ On the other hand there are those who see that many men and women are excluded from the use of these means and their possibilities and they suffer marginalization. They add that the process of maturation of the person presents many problems. Withdrawal, dissociation, solipsism, and individualism are emerging in this networked society, a society in which we are subjects of the lords of the cloud, who control our steps in the course we digitally chart with their technology. We are subjects, yes, more than citizens. We are users. Michele Nors, the business face of the Valentino firm, gathered in this expression the common feeling of the observers: "Technology brings us closer to the ones who are most distant and distances us from the ones who are closest."

⁶⁴ "Social networks are not a set of individuals, but a set of relationships between individuals. And they are finding systems that allow different platforms of social networks to interact with each other. The key concept is no longer 'presence' in the network, but 'connection': if we are present but not connected, we are 'alone'. You enter the network to experience or increase a certain form of proximity. It is necessary, therefore, to understand well that the very concept of 'neighbor' and more specifically that of 'friendship' is modified and developed precisely because of the network." ANTONIO SPADARO. *Ciberteología. Pensar el cristianismo en tiempos de la red*. Barcelona: Herder, 2014, p. 64.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24; FERNANDO PRADO. *La era digital. Una oportunidad para la vida consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2011; Aa.Vv. *Conectad@s. Vida consagrada y cultura digital*. Madrid: PCI, 2011; Aa.Vv. "Internet en la vida religiosa". *VidRel* 112 (2012) 84-160. This is a special issue with the invitation to serve the possible prophecy, to be consecrated men and women in the digital age and to provide hope in this digitalized society. Aa. Vv. (a cura di Albert Schmucki e Donatella Forlani). *La vita consacrata e il nuovo ambiente digitale. Sfide e opportunità formative*. Bologna: EDB, 2015.

⁶⁶ The chiaroscuro "is a way of setting-up what is real. It indicates that reality is capable of structuring itself in circuits where light and darkness are confused, and where this confusion is capable of producing new levels of reality," IGNACIO IZUZQUIZA. *Filosofía de la tensión: realidad, silencio y claroscuro*. Barcelona: Anthropos, 2004, p. 192.

⁶⁷ Cf. CHIARA GIACCARDI, *Abitare il presente*, Messaggero, Padova, 2014, p. 6.

It is necessary to break the ambiguity that surrounds "cyberspace" when speaking of proximity. Here the one who is connected is proximate and the one who is eating at the same table, who prays by my side or sleeps in the next room, is distant.

b) Communication as Proximity. A New Humanism?

The digital age wants to be the expression of a new humanism. The digital code, agent and symbol of the new civilization, seeks to replace the written, legal, economic, political and ethical traditions. Virtualization creates new movements, new communities, a new "we" based on ideals, feelings, beliefs, interests, etc. "It is no coincidence that to describe its deployment we use figures related to infection, contamination, propagation, that is to say, to figures of animation, circulation, the reproduction of the living. Technology and computer science, in their production and their uses, constitute a body, and this body forms, in its social reality, the digital."⁶⁸ The cited author, after a description of this *corpus*, the fruit of the intimate relationships between codes, interfaces and uses, adds: "The machine makes us dream, but it is man who dreams. And what is digital does not stop looking for the dream of the machine itself with its transformations of what is human."⁶⁹

According to Milad Douelhi himself, there exists something like a domestication of what is human within the bosom of the machine. "If I insist," he says, "in these exchanges between real and virtual spaces, between the human body and the technical body, it is because they are the interfaces between these forms of corporeity that organize and form the articulations of digital culture. This culture has generated a completely new context: between the principle of biological life (survival, reproduction, and evolution) and the intelligence of the historical context. To adapt oneself, to adapt and make others adapt, these are the slogans of the new context."⁷⁰ At the conclusion of his reflection, he adds: "Digital is a new way of manufacturing memory and interpreting it. In a certain sense, it forces us to rethink our relationships with what is memorized, but also to imagine new ways of preserving and exploring our purely digital productions. The challenges are enormous, since we live in a period of transition in which the management of this memory, of the writings as identities, is confused and imprecise. Our challenge is to work together on the methods of a new form of management of memory, identity, and knowledge, and to establish an ethic and a policy of access."⁷¹

⁶⁸ MILAD DOUELHI. "Qué es humanismo digital". In: SERGE CHAMPEAU-DANIEL INNERARITY. *Internet y el futuro de la democracia*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2012, pp. 203-204. On successive pages he adds: "Digital sociability is a new way of making society: automatic reading of itself (depending on the categories, the profile and its modulations), identity is built in an exchange between logical fragments and network actions. Interventions, associations, approaches, fortuitous encounters that rest on similarities and kinships of a new kind, between categories and position on a network and, finally, forms of association that produce meaning and relevance, are the elementary particles of digital identity." (pp. 205-206). See also: ROSI BRADOTTI. *Lo posthumano*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2015; ALBERT CORTINA-MIGUEL ÁNGEL SERRA. *¿Humanos o posthumanos? Singularidad tecnológica y mejoramiento humano*. Fragmenta, 2015. Where we are going, at what cost and with how many problems or disorders, remains to be seen.

⁶⁹ Id., p. 204.

⁷⁰ Id., p. 206.

⁷¹ Id., p. 208. Cf. NICETO BLÁZQUEZ. «Ética para internet». *Studium* 47 (2007) 1-34.

It seems that the opportune posture that must be adopted in the face of this technological advance, with such unusual possibilities, must be integrating. It is necessary to take on the novelty and know how to channel it. The spaces created by man are human, because they are inhabited by man. They are not neutral. There are many possibilities that allow for enriching our presence through interaction and exchange. We have new knowledge and new pedagogies. Teamwork is facilitated from different places. Those who are enthusiastic about digital techno-culture and aim for a transhumanism in which the world will be happy because of the convergence between man and machine, forget that people are moved by intentions and machines obey instructions or orders.

Man maintains the freedom of free access and of free interruption or withdrawal. Only those who are not alert can fall into the trap of determinism or come to believe that the human being is a machine. On the other hand, we have to ask ourselves: Will the information and communication technologies be capable of satisfying the deep longings of human beings? Where lies our deep aspiration to transcendence, to the absolute and to the encounter with God? What has the right to privacy become? We are in liquid surveillance, in continuous control without noticing it.⁷² Is participation in the network society really democratic? How are companies governed that fight over the transmission of this knowledge and whose ultimate intentions are unknown? What are the limits and problems that are created by speed, immediacy, and ideological pluralism? How can we discern the problems that digital culture entails and not be victims of manipulation?

Later, we will again deal with the concrete issues that originate in the field of religious governance. The digital culture, from the faith perspective, offers a vision of the world, society and the Church, the Institutes of consecrated life and local communities as spaces of closeness and encounter, exchange, encouragement for growth and solidarity in mission.⁷³ At this point I only wish to highlight that this cultural tsunami must be received, discerned and assumed as far as it helps us to grow personally, communally and apostolically. Physical and virtual presence are two methods that ask for harmony and complementarity. Freedom, discernment, and responsibility, which always imply openness, generosity, compassion, and help, are values that can be polished, but not mitigated or diluted. Now, who will lead this harmony?

It is common to lament in one forum or another, and also in religious communities, that, being with those next to us, our mind or heart is absorbed in another world of relationships. Can you keep a conversation with someone who incessantly responds to their cell phone or does not stop looking at the computer screen in case a new email pops up? What is the quality of presence of the one who pays greater attention to those who are distant than to those who are in their physical surroundings?⁷⁴

I end this point with these words of Pope Francis: "Today's media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from

⁷² ZYGMUNT BAUMAN-DAVID LYON. *Vigilancia líquida*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2013.

⁷³ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Message for the 48th World Communications Day. Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter* (June 1, 2014). "I like seeing this power of communication as 'neighbourliness,'" he says in the text.

⁷⁴ Reflections on the subject, cf. Aa.Vv. *Cittadini nella mediapolis*, RSE, 2013/2; JESÚS M. ALDAY (ed.). *Conect@s. Vida consagrada y cultura digital*. Madrid: PCI, 2011.

direct contact with the pain, the fears, and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences. For this reason, we should be concerned that, alongside the exciting possibilities offered by these media, a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolation, can also arise."⁷⁵

3. EXPRESSIONS AND METHODS OF PRESENCE

People are limited in their development. Personality is created between calls and responses, exercising freedom responsibly and always presenting their "face," image and countenance, but not always in the same way and for that reason, although they make themselves present and transmit light and kindness, they will not do it with the same intensity. It underlies mood swings, as the classics said. In fact, we find people who present a blurred, diffuse, confused, impoverished, and distant image. The gestures, smile, language, and signs of affection are important, but, above all, the light and tenderness that spring from their interior is decisive. Much depends on the temperament, character, and manners acquired. There are those who, in any field, want to stand out and be noticed and there are those who, with their maturity, sensitivity and capacity for acceptance, without trying to do it, radiate peace and benevolence, who are attractive for what they are, not for what they do or the position that they occupy, and they are a point of convergence and communion. It reveals whether they are people who are centered, rooted, with a strong identity and living consistently with the values they profess. They are transparent about what they are and it is enough. That is their cover letter. Other types of people, because of their egocentricity, their disorientation and dispersion, their complexes and insecurities, their imbalances, fears, inhibitions, or because of many other causes, go unnoticed.

All people carry a spark inside, a burning ember that must be made to shine and set on fire. They carry a vital energy that must be developed and which is necessary to transform the world in which they live. It is the gift of life that is present and can be improved. They are like the talents which you have to negotiate (Mt 25:14-30). We live our vocation and mission every day and we construct ourselves based on responses in creative fidelity. It means that our presence gradually becomes transparent, but not always in an ascending way. There are ups and downs, hard moments and setbacks or opposition. Only one who leads a life with a storyline and fits whatever happens into a theological life is transparent and consistent and manages to dazzle with their presence.

Surveying briefly, we can list and comment on some positive and negative presences.

1) *Positive presences* are those presences that are luminous, communicating, liberating, inspiring, serving, harmonizing, keeping watch and strengthening, in short, transforming. The positive presence of those who are free, reflects peace with themselves and helps to affirm the identity of others; that of those who open the frame of reference and make the group tight-knit with belonging. This type of presence shines positive values: meaning, freedom, communion, hope, courage, trust, and love.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato si'*, n. 47.

⁷⁶ Cf. WAYNE W. DYER. *Tus zonas erróneas. Técnicas audaces pero sencillas, para dominar los esquemas erróneos de tu conducta*. Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1990, pp. 305-321. [For the English edition see, WAYNE W. DYER, *Your Erroneous Zones: Step-by-Step Advice for Escaping the Trap of Negative Thinking and Taking Control of Your Life*.

2) *Negative presences* are the ones that provoke tensions and conflicts and create divisions. The presences are negative of those who are opaque and do not allow the clean water that is to be drunk to spring forth, who create unfounded guilt. They are negative presences of those who see everything as black, who are pessimistic, spiteful, think badly, feel bad, and act badly. This "omnipresent", controlling and interventionist presence is negative. In this group are those who are infected by the deadly sins (pride, greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony and sloth) and the new vices of our time: consumerism, conformism or permissiveness, shamelessness, obsession with sex, emotional immaturity (sociopathy), looking elsewhere, emptiness or nihilism in the face of commitment.⁷⁷ But, probably, the most negative presence is that of the one who lies because of the effect it produces. Nietzsche was irrefutable when he said: "I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you."

In virtual communication these types of positive and negative presences also appear, that is, they build up and they tear down.

4. COMMUNITY OF PRESENCES, LIVING COMMUNITIES

1. *Presence of Brothers and Sisters*

The religious community is a "community of presences." All people have gifts and their presences are a memory of gratuity; they are recognition of the other gifts and openings to the divine presence, which is complete and which we cannot manipulate. The Council expressed it this way: "As members of Christ living together as brothers, religious should give pride of place in esteem to each other and bear each other's burdens. For the community, a true family gathered together in the name of the Lord by God's love which has flooded the hearts of its members through the Holy Spirit, rejoices because He is present among them." (PC 15) The Spirit is light and life and makes people present themselves with everything they have received and they discover the saving presence of Jesus. It is in the religious profession which makes *common calling* and *common belief* explicit.

The religious profession is the great door of the community in which consecration to God in the following of Christ and the mission according to the charism of the Founder is lived with shared responsibility. It is the moment when, with the grace of the Holy Spirit and the help of the Virgin Mary, the *commitment* to live perfect charity in the service of God and the Church is sealed. All the members of the People of God who attend the act of the profession are witnesses to the

HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2009.] In these pages he paints the portrait of a person who has eliminated all their erroneous zones. R. Guardini, referring to Socrates, says: "Not every personality admits of what is called contact in such a degree. This requires a character which is not simply equivalent with greatness of mind or human lovableness. A man may have admirable qualities, but of such a kind that they raise a barrier between him and those who would approach him. Another has the greatest influence, but only through his achievements, while he himself, personally, remains in the background. Again there are characters which captivate people, but are of no significance beyond that." ROMANO GUARDINI. *La muerte de Sócrates*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Emecé, 1960, p. II. [For English edition see, ROMANO GUARDINI, *The Death of Socrates* (1948) Kindle Edition, Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2014.]

⁷⁷ Cf. UMBERTO GALIMBERTI. *I vizi capitali e in nuovi vizi*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003; BERNARDO STAMATEAS. *Gente tóxica. Cómo tratar con las personas que te complican la vida*. Barcelona: Ed. B, 2012. Later he published: *Más gente tóxica. Cómo son los que te quieren mal para sentirse bien*. Barcelona: Ed. B, 2014. Whoever looks at these two publications can quickly make a line-up of negative presences.

consecration and emission of vows. But those who are present for charismatic reasons, because they belong to the same institute of which they profess, are witnesses who *commit themselves* to the one professing. The reciprocity of presences begins publicly in the profession that is performed before the brothers or sisters of the community and before the competent superior. Hence, when a man or woman religious professes, the entire Congregation is involved.⁷⁸

Making this *commitment* come alive is a progressive task. It is necessary to be on alert, vigilant, with the lights on, with a trembling and compassionate heart, with outstretched hands, with arms ready to help. It happens, sometimes, that we look around, we see that everyone is there and, for whatever reason, we experience isolation and solitude. We are disinterested in others. We have our mind and heart set elsewhere. Our presence is physical, but we are spiritually absent. Other times we say that we are spiritually united, but we refuse to give the most basic help. Presence in community requires something else; it requires encounter with all the depth described. It implies trembling from the presence of God, from the presence of Christ and from the presence of the Spirit, which becomes reality in us when we listen to the Word of God, celebrate the Eucharist, and exercise the works of mercy. This is how this presence becomes a transforming force.

Being together is not enough guarantee of active presence, of a presence of light and harmony. We can be harboring indifference, distrust, envy, and resentment. But starting from being together, in virtue of the gifts received, we can open ourselves, create an atmosphere of convergence and communion, and together face the challenges of the mission.⁷⁹

This does not mean that we try to homogenize communities in the monastic or conventual style. The typology of communities is as diverse as that which springs from their charism and mission in the Church and is outlined in the Constitutions of each institute. On the other hand, today each community has its community project developed with great flexibility and looking for ways to combine the great areas of spirituality, formation, fellowship, and apostolic services. Here what we are talking about is how the members of the community live as brothers and sisters, disciples and apostles who give life to an evangelical and evangelizing project.

It is true that it is worth tending to what has been called "mono-residential communities," so numerous in these times for various reasons: pastoral, familial and those that arise from the

⁷⁸ "Those present" has a deeply theological meaning, and not just a legal one. "Those present" of which the Formula of Profession that appears in the *Ritual for religious profession and the consecration of virgins* and that each institute expresses differently: in the presence of the People of God, in the presence of the Church, in the presence of you brothers, in your presence superior, etc.

⁷⁹ Pope Francis tells us: "Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a 'mystique' of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage. Greater possibilities for communication thus turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone. If we were able to take this route, it would be so good, so soothing, so liberating, and hope-filled! To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us. To be self-enclosed is to taste the bitter poison of immanence, and humanity will be worse for every selfish choice we make." (EG 87)

difficulties inherent in common life.⁸⁰ But there are those who advocate for a fraternal life so broad and vague that it allows them to enjoy the benefits of certain encounters, but without contributing anything to the construction of a community life that has to take into account the elderly, the sick, those in formation and the needs of other brothers and sisters on the front lines of the mission. We should remember what Pedro Casaldàliga said:

“Between you and me
the distance, me.
But the bridge, brother,
The two of us.”
And on another occasion he said:
“Two problems, two:
Others and me.
The difficult other,
the difficult me.
The hard we
of communion.”

The best way to overcome the difficulties inherent in human limitations is to continue striving to offer quality of community life. Community revitalization that leads to processes of transformation of people and works (conversion to charismatic values and reorganization of presences and services) is important. The primary objective cannot be exclusion, but integration, communion according to the primacy of God in "our" life and our mission in the Church and in society. Those who govern, according to the mission of the Spirit, have to promote the synergy of personal gifts, care for the bonds, favor creativity, and accompany in times of growth and of decrease.

When you meet a living community of brothers and sisters do not count the number, nor the ages or physical limitations. Count the theological life, the living in the presence of God, and in the way of blessing his name in the present time. This comment by J. Vanier leaves an impression: “Sometimes I find communities that are made up of some elderly people. The time of its expansion is over and now it is too late for any young person to enter. Sometimes, I am amazed at the joy and peace that reigns there. The members of this community know that they are going to die, but they do not care. They want to live fully to the end the grace that has been given to them. These communities have much to contribute to the world: learning to take on failures and die in peace. Is it not the acceptance of their own suffering and the offering of their sacrifice that gives birth to young and dynamic communities?”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Cf. JEAN CLAUDE LAVIGNE. *Para que tengan vida en abundancia*. La vida religiosa. Madrid: PCl, 2013, pp. 215-216.

⁸¹ J. VANIER. *La comunidad: lugar de perdón y fiesta*. Madrid: Narcea, 1980, p. 100. Then he adds: "In other communities, on the contrary, these elders live in anguish at their sterility because they have not discovered that it could be transformed into the gift of life through offering and sacrifice." [Translator's note: Citations are translations from the Spanish edition; for the English edition see JEAN VANIER, *Community & Growth: Our Pilgrimage Together*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1979.]

2. The Reciprocity of Presences: Dynamics and Extension

We are different. There is a radical dissymmetry in people. But, because we are constituted in relationship, we are always open and we can enjoy reciprocity. We are continuously questioned. First from above, from the one who deigns to call us by our name, and others also question us. Dialogue is a vehicle and an exponent of reciprocity, with everything that giving and receiving entail. "In dialogue, each one considers the other as a person and as *this* person, opening themselves up and guiding one another with a desire for reciprocity. *This dialogical reciprocity has a well-defined structure: to go out of oneself, to put oneself in the point of view of the other, to listen to the other, to allow oneself to be questioned by them and to respond.*"⁸² The result of this dialogical dynamic is the reciprocity of giving and receiving the other." The gift that is reciprocated connects us. It is not enough to be attached to a house, it is not enough to live together in the space and in the social context, but to "belong" to a community and make the communion of life operational.

Jesus wants us in reciprocity: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). "Remain in me, as I remain in you" (Jn 15:4). Reciprocity in the Christian life, and, therefore, in religious life, is embodied in the Pauline image of the body. "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, is one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:12-13). "But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it. If one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it." (1 Cor 12:24-27). The members interact, they show solidarity, and nobody underestimates the other. Together they make the body find harmony and act with shared responsibility, in solidarity.

The dynamic that creates the well-being of the body, of the entirety of the connected members, is love, charity. Nothing is comparable to charity (1 Cor 13:1-7). It eliminates all temptation of dismantling, disintegration, and arouses communion.

Fruit of this reciprocity of presences is the communal "we" that confesses, concelebrates, coexists, and commits itself. Communication is more intense. There is greater transparency. The covenant is firmer and stronger. Identity is reaffirmed, belonging is consolidated, and availability grows. The community of presences - or of people who are present, starting with themselves - fully carries out the testimony of charity. It is leaven and it is a proclamation of the new heaven and the new earth. "God's dwelling is with the human race" (cf. Rev 21:1-3). "In this way, religious community becomes the place where we learn daily to take on that new mind which allows us to live in fraternal communion through the richness of diverse gifts and which, at the same time,

⁸² XOSÉ MANUEL DOMÍNGUEZ PRIETO. *Antropología de la familia. Persona, matrimonio y familia*. Madrid: BAC, 2007, p. 90.

fosters a convergence of these gifts towards fraternity and towards co-responsibility in the apostolic plan.”⁸³

I add another perspective that unites the experience of consecration according to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The vows are authentic highways that bring us closer and favor the bonds, both within the community and in society. The heart "sine proprio"; pure, joyful and generous; free and docile to the will of the Father, expresses the great love received and the love given. It is a sign of friendship with God and with men. Friendship is reciprocal love and makes one out of several. Is there anything more proximate than charity? The vows are signs and means that empower reciprocity. Hence the importance of leaders promoting fidelity to as much gift as they represent and as much energy as they generate in the proclamation of the Kingdom. They promote proximity: 1) poverty as communication of goods and solidarity, making having everything in common a reality and working for justice; 2) chastity as love that makes family in the Spirit with one heart and anticipates the future world; and 3) obedience as listening, communal discernment and missionary availability. The three dimensions of consecrated life open our eyes to see where others are in need, they enlarge our hearts to welcome them, they put our feet on the path to shorten distances, they open our arms to welcome them and they extend our hands to help them. In short, they contribute to the existence and maintenance of *proximity*; it is communion.

The community, where there is reciprocity of presences, remains open and sends forth. This reciprocity is not a looking at each other, but it is indicating the direction. Community life is full of creative fantasy. The community is always open to the most urgent needs. The challenges that come from outside have an echo and effect inside. Nothing is foreign to it. Social, political, and economic life affect it. Above all, it is greatly affected by the life of the local Church where it is rooted and from which it serves the universal Church. Here reciprocity acquires another name: mutual relationships with other vocations and ministries. In the local Church, the community is the ferment of communion in families, in groups and in the presbyterate. Its inner harmony radiates concord and is a universal missionary impulse.

In the community of presences there is an exchange of participatory looks, a perfume that envelops the whole house and is enveloped in dreams that come true. It is clear that the reciprocity of presences that is lived and makes communion grow has little to do with what is quantifiable, measurable, effective, and profitable. People's ages do not count, because, in each individual, neither their age nor how good or bad their health is prevent the radiation of the light that comes from the gift received.

The brothers and sisters demand to seek together the truth and the will of God, to sustain themselves in following even to the cross, to confess the faith that gives them life, to walk in hope and to build the kingdom. They seek out demands in the realization of difficult missionary projects in the wide peripheries of poverty, migration, culture, health and education, communication and many others.

⁸³ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community*. (2 February 1994), 39.

5. WHEN PRESENCE LACKS EXPRESSION

1. *Presence-Absence. Inexpressiveness*

There is a logic of contrast between presence and absence. There is absence in the face of presence. Ordinarily, absence is spoken of as a deficiency, something negative. But absence is also significant on many occasions. There is usually absence when something is missing, like space (being), words (silence), light (darkness), or expressiveness (rigidity or inaction). But this is not always the case because distance is part of the encounter, silence can free us from chatter and be a sign of welcome and listening,⁸⁴ and even the darkness can be a test that leads to seeking. What is difficult is to find meaning in inexpressiveness.

About "being here and being present", Eduardo Bueno describes in this poem the situation of indifference:

You look but you do not see.
You talk but you do not say.
You hear but you do not listen.
You feel but you do not love.
(...)
You laugh but you do not enjoy.
You cry but you do not suffer.
You live but you are not here.
You are here but you are not present.⁸⁵

In community life, where people make themselves present, fellowship, or being in relationship, communication, mutual help, and cordiality take place normally. We can understand interruptions and times of absence, for multiple reasons. They can suppose a certain lack of presence, but if the fundamental bonds remain alive, there is no problem. All of us cannot always be together and in the same place. The evangelizing mission, which polarizes consecrated life, demands this "lacking" that brings growth to the community.

There is a type of absence that can be classified as "inexpressiveness," which has a varied casuistry. It manifests itself in the rigidity of factions and depends to a great extent on different personalities: hardness, coldness, insensitivity, motivation, and superiority. The expressive facial language is lost (smiles, grimaces, and affability).

Pedro Casaldáliga's complaint remains a sad observation:

"The brothers cross paths without looking at each other,
absent from soul to soul. (...)

⁸⁴ Cf. HENRI J. M. NOUWEN. *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, New York, HarperOne/Harper Collins Publishers, 2016. The chapter dedicated to silence is precious.

⁸⁵ In the prologue to the book of JUAN CARLOS CUBEIRO. *La sensación de fluidez. Desarrollo del liderazgo en todos los sentidos*. Madrid: Pearson, 2011, pp. XIII y XIV.

Two inches away from each other;
separated by the hatchet of jealousy,
in their home's patio. Immensely
absent men
from men...!".⁸⁶

It is true. In community it is easy to identify the inexpressiveness of some presences. We can be present there as if we were not there. Other times absence is significant or not being there, not participating, not collaborating, and not speaking. The worst are absences due to mistrust. Not believing in others leads to not living with them. Then comes exclusion or self-exclusion, those who no longer count or those who lose interest in relationships with others, self-marginalization due to sadness, loneliness, evasion, and escapism, obsession about physical, mental and professional well-being, anything so as not to "encounter" our brothers and sisters. Whoever avoids the presence of their brothers and sisters walks in darkness and ravages the community.

During these last decades we have been trying to improve fraternal life and missionary service. The culture of "interconnections" has fostered encounters and forums for dialogue and discernment, by age, by culture, or by apostolic occupation. It is true that, in religious life, we have gained tolerance in the face of diversity as far as our ways of thinking, but we still have a need for convergence between age groups and between ethnic groups and cultures. That which is called to be a source of richness through integration and complementarity is sometimes a spotlight of distance, tension, and conflict. The humanizing and evangelizing service supposes a great passion for unity and missionary communion. There is still much to be done as far as mutual recognition and appreciation. Assignments that are pending include dedicating time and taking small steps toward cordiality.⁸⁷ Young people ask to be accompanied in their slow pace of growth, the elderly and the sick hope for closeness, an expressive presence of love. It is the best medicine to cure their toxic thoughts, incomprehensible forgetfulness and, at times, eccentric expressions.

2. *Recovering accompaniment (genuine proximity)*

We have devalued *accompaniment*. For different reasons and with some frequency, we give the impression of what Marcel Proust said: "Since then, whenever in the course of my life I have come across, in convents for instance, truly saintly embodiments of practical charity, they have generally had the cheerful, practical, brusque and unemotional air of a busy surgeon, the sort of face in which one can discern no commiseration, no tenderness at the sight of suffering humanity, no fear of hurting it, the impassive, unsympathetic, sublime face of true goodness."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ PEDRO CASALDÁLIGA. *Llena de Dios y tan nuestra. Antología mariana*. Madrid, 1990.

⁸⁷ "We choose love by taking small steps of love every time there is an opportunity. A smile, a handshake, a word of encouragement, a phone call, a card, an embrace, a kind greeting, a gesture of support, a moment of attention, a helping hand, a present, a financial contribution, a visit — all these are little steps toward love. Each step is like a candle burning in the night. It does not take the darkness away, but it guides us through the darkness. When we look back after many small steps of love, we will discover that we have made a long and beautiful journey." HENRI J. M. NOUWEN. *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, HarperOne/Harper Collins Publishers, 2006. p. 141.

⁸⁸ MARCEL PROUST. *Remembrance of Things Past: Swanns Way Within a Budding Grove*, New York, Vintage Books Edition/Random House, p. 89.

We have become more supportive and we show it in generous help, even dedicating our time to others, but we have not completely placed ourselves in the profound motivation of our help. Are we really moved by compassion? Do we give priority to charity that leads us to love our neighbor as ourselves?

When we look at the other and become their neighbors, we reveal the importance we give them as people in the face of any institution or work. The person acquires primordial value. Jesus gives us indications for quality in accompaniment, his preference for the weak who are sinners, poor or sick. He told those sent by John that the blind see, the lame walk ... and the poor are evangelized (cf. Lk 7:8-33). He chose a tax collector (cf. Mk 2:13-17) and he ate with tax collectors and sinners (cf. Mt 9:10-13). He invites the poor, the blind, the crippled and the lame to dinner (Lk 14:21). These predilections show the proximity of Jesus, which must be that of any leader.

Reading the letter from E. Levinas to Christians, in which he makes three references to proximity, is moving: 1) His identification with Matthew, Chapter 25. 2) The prayer of Ana, mother of Samuel, and her words to the priest Eli: "No, my lord! I am an unhappy woman. I have had neither wine nor liquor; I was only pouring out my heart to the Lord." This woman, continues Levinas, "pronounced the true prayer of the heart: the pouring out of a soul. Authentic relationship, strength of the soul, personification of the relationship. This is what I have seen in the temple. Such proximity! Such proximity remains in me." 3) The recognition and protection in the house of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul.⁸⁹

If we want to recover accompaniment it will be necessary for us to foster *compassion* as a way of sharing the suffering of the one who is lying prostrate. But first, it is necessary to go out of ourselves, to cultivate admiration, to contemplate the pain of others and to get involved through adhesion and responsibility. Only then will we understand the joy that it is better to give than to receive (cf. Acts 20:35).

We often look to the Samaritan man. With good reason, because this parable sums up and gives weight to the proximity of Jesus, who was always walking along the roads giving out compassion: with the Syrophoenician woman, with the sinful woman, with the lepers, with the sick, with the blind, with the children, with the sinners, with the Roman centurion, with the widow of Naim and so many others. Jesus moves closer to them and lets them come closer to him.

We cannot try to recover accompaniment without a sincere conversion to the core values of the Gospel or, more concretely, to the person of Jesus. We are his neighbors and only from him do we become Samaritans. And like the Good Samaritan, we too must involve others in healing the wounded. Compassion leads us to "being a voice for those who are unable to speak for themselves,"⁹⁰ to eradicate the causes that arouse contempt for the life and dignity of the person, and to make our fraternity the credible sign and the most powerful force for the effective collaboration of believers and non-believers in favor of the needy.

⁸⁹ "Levinas: Gracias, cristianos". *Avvenire*, sección «Ágora» (10-IX-2000). Text published in *Anatelléy. Se levanta* (magazine of thought published by the Claretians of Córdoba, Argentina) Año IX, n. 18 (2007) 35-37.

⁹⁰ EE 36. Cf. RHP 4,d.

Proximity arouses and motivates solidarity. Saint Teresa of Calcutta stood before those who were dying on the street without anyone to attend to them. She fixed her eyes on them and with the tenderness of Jesus began her great work giving of herself. Neighbors are not over there, they are not the others, that is, they are not the beaten, the wounded, the marginalized, but rather they are those of us who approach those who suffer and those who need us. Accompaniment means going out of ourselves, contemplating and believing in the real needs and taking care of them. *“The relationship of accompaniment is shown to us as a belief in the need of the other, capable of provoking in those who feel it a work for the remedy of that need; and, reciprocally, as a belief in the benevolence of the neighbor, directly provoked by the help received from him and determining a response at a grateful and favorable time.”*⁹¹ We become neighbors by loving the other as ourselves. There is no neighbor for those who live only for themselves and their own interests.

In the community, when presences are diluted, life moves between politeness and the essential assistance to community acts, which are given a purely regulatory value. There is a return to the formalities criticized and hated in other times. Living like this is how homes become boarding houses.

J. Vanier speaks of the sin of enriching oneself and its sinful consequences in community life. He brings as an example what Ezequiel narrates in chapter 16 about the Jewish community, represented in that young woman whom he saves; he lavishes gifts on her and she in return becomes a prostitute. And he points out as sins of the community: “The first sin of a community is to turn its eyes from the One who called it to life, to look at itself instead. The second sin is to find itself beautiful and to believe itself to be a source of life. If it does this, it turns away from God and begins to compromise with society and the world; it becomes renowned. The third sin is that of despair. The community discovers that it is not a source of life, that it is poor, and that it lacks vitality and creativity. And so it withdraws into its sadness, into the darkness of its poverty and death.” Immediately he adds: “But God, like the father of the prodigal son, does not cease to wait. Communities which have set aside the inspiration of God to rely on their own power should know how to return humbly to ask his forgiveness.”⁹²

When we are committed to accompaniment, to proximity and to fraternity, the identity to which we have committed is reaffirmed. All egocentrism or individualism is overcome, exclusion is eradicated, and an identifying freedom is achieved. Wounds are healed. The crisis of foundation begins to be overcome.

⁹¹ PEDRO LAÍN ENTRALGO. *Teoría y realidad del otro*. Madrid: Alianza, 1983, p. 620. The reflection about the parable of the Samaritan man is clarifying by JOSEP M. ESQUIROL. *Uno mismo y los otros. De las experiencias existenciales a la interculturalidad*. Barcelona: Herder, 2005, pp. 89-92.

⁹² J. VANIER, *Community and Growth*, revised edition, Paulist Press/New York/Mahwah, p. 159.

PART THREE

LEADING FROM PROXIMITY

THE PRESENCE OF THE LEADER

*“The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring,
reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze
which also heals, liberates
and encourages growth in the Christian life.”*

(EG 169)

1. MOVED BY THE SPIRIT

Leading from proximity is to collaborate with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life and active principle of communion. The presence of the Spirit is grounding and motivating. St. Paul affirms: “And no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord.’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). He is gratifying, he fills us with his fruits: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal 5:22). “God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Gal 4:6). Consecrated life, like the Church, is a communion animated by the mysterious, vital principle that is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit creates and encourages the most profound proximity.⁹³

Without the Spirit we would not understand anything that surrounds us: not the harmony of the universe, nor its creative dynamism, nor the history of salvation. The Spirit accompanies the people who are going to have some responsibility in the journey of the chosen people. He bursts in through the judges, accompanies the kings, makes the prophets speak, announces the coming of the Messiah, and becomes the principle of moral life.

Without the Spirit we would not understand the Church either and we would not understand consecrated life in her. The Holy Spirit is the principle of unity and catholicity of the Church. He sanctifies it and makes it apostolic. “The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression” (EG 119).

The Holy Spirit is “*memoria Jesu*,” not in a speculative way, but existentially. He is a creative remembering. He communicates with God and makes us partakers of the divine life. He is the operative principle of communion; integrates the disintegrated and dispersed and offers harmony and peace. He is a reconciling force and offers the right word for the defense. He is the protagonist and energizes the evangelizing mission. He makes us evoke and give meaning to Jesus’ life and word. Through Him we understand the mystery of the incarnation and what it means to “dwell among us” (Jn 1:14). Through Him we welcome the Gospel of Jesus and the luminous teaching of the successors of the apostles.⁹⁴ In this context, these words of Blessed Paul VI are accurate: “[The Church’s] authority was established by Christ. It is His representative, the authoritative organ of His Word, the expression of His great pastoral love. Hence obedience has faith as its starting point. It is exercised in the school of evangelical humility. It is a participation

⁹³ One could say of the leader that they are “an accomplice of the Spirit.” Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES. *Cómplices del Espíritu. El nuevo paradigma de la Misión*. Madrid: PCI, 2014.

⁹⁴ Remember the words of Jesus: “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you” (Jn 14:26). “When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn 16:13-14). Before that he had said: “He will testify to me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning” (Jn 15:26b-27). “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’...And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’...” (Jn 20:19-22). Luke ends his Gospel by putting these words in the mouth of Jesus: “And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49).

in the wisdom, unity, idealism, and charity which are ruling factors in the corporate life of the Church. It confers upon him who commands and upon him who obeys the merit of being like Christ who 'was made obedient even unto death' (Phil 2: 8)."⁹⁵

The presence of God in the world and in history, in the personal life of the believer and the Christian community, is the environment in which, consciously or unconsciously, we move, we think, we plan and we decide. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Pope Francis comments: "God's presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice. This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered. God does not hide himself from those who seek him with a sincere heart, even though they do so tentatively, in a vague and haphazard manner."⁹⁶

Within the religious community, which is charismatic in its entirety, there are people who have received a mission of service. They are no better than the others but, being brothers or sisters of all, they are the evangelical, charismatic, and institutional leaders. They are those summoned, of those gathered, of those who have received the same spirit as the others to live an identical project of evangelical life according to the spirit of the founder or foundress. When it comes to wanting to exercise this mission that is one of unity and evangelizing stimulus, they have to look to Jesus and the Founder. Two models for leading from proximity, from merciful love.⁹⁷

Those who are moved by the Spirit do not adopt a passive position; they are not conformists. Docility to the Spirit is the beginning of the revolution of love and creativity; of flexibility and innovation; of the extent and depth of the relations between communities and their members. Leaders who are guided by the Spirit are committed to life, to new ways of living together and bringing harmony to the different times. They relativize the means and are not afraid of new approaches, new ways of seeing, thinking and acting. The history of the foundations testifies to shifts in cultural, social and ecclesial paradigms, which have given rise to new organizations and styles of consecrated life. The Spirit does not put limits on the possibilities not yet discovered. He always applies an inclusive and harmonizing strength. He transcends spaces and times. But he is demanding; even to the point of asking us to embrace the cross, like Jesus, who, in order to save us all, traveled so many paths and was a friend to the sick, the poor, and sinners.

⁹⁵ PAUL VI. *Ecclesiam suam*, n. 114.

⁹⁶ *Evangelii gaudium*, 71.

⁹⁷ From the origins of monasticism there has been a constant for those who guide the community: the love of neighbor and not only those in the monastery or convent, but also all those who relate with the monks or friars. Simply read the rules of St. Augustine and St. Benedict. The Master Jordan of Saxony, speaking of Saint Dominic, said: "His mind was always steady and calm, except when he was stirred by a feeling of compassion and mercy; (...) He made it his own business to rejoice with those who were rejoicing and to weep with those who wept. He was full of affection and gave himself utterly to caring for his neighbors and to showing sympathy for the unfortunate." JORDAN OF SAXONY. *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, Volume 1 of Dominican Sources: New Editions in English Series Issue 1 of Dominican sources, Editor and translator, Simon Tugwell, Parable Publishers, Middlebury, Vermont, 1982.

In a time such as ours, of unstable beliefs, the leader must frequently invoke the Holy Spirit. He alone can strengthen the faith that has so much to do with the love of life and the horizon of hope for the community.

2. LOOKING AT JESUS' LEADERSHIP

The presence of the king, said D. Francisco de Quevedo, is the best part of what he commands. "When in danger, the king who watches commands with his eyes. The eyes of the prince are the most powerful weapon; and in the vassals, their ardor is different when assisted by their lord." He tells what happened when Jesus was with the apostles. If he was with them, they were united, everything was in harmony. Peter was filled with bravery in the face of those who wanted to arrest him. But if Jesus went ahead, if he fell asleep in the boat, if he went away to pray, the pretensions, fears, fatigue and, in Peter, the denials begin to surface.⁹⁸

The presence of Jesus stirs up his disappointed disciples. "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way?" (Lk 24:32).

In previous pages I have already made some allusions to Jesus as a leader who teaches with authority and who shows compassion. We are going to spend a little more time on the figure of Jesus, to whom anyone who exercises the mission of governance in communities cannot stop looking.

In recent years many authors, following the best tradition of apostolic religious life, have highlighted these traits: the good shepherd, the servant, the compassionate leader, and the wounded healer.⁹⁹ It is obvious that emphasizing one aspect or another marks the style of leadership and indicates the way to proceed in governance in one's relationship with people.

Jesus in the Gospel teaches who is the greatest. "Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as *Benefactors*; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves'" (Lk 22:24-27. Cf. Mk 10:42-45).

In verse 27, Jesus offers the key to understanding the service of governance in the communities of the Kingdom. Two particles qualify it: "*among*" and "*as*". "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling *among* us" (Jn 1:14). Saint Paul invites the Philippians: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of

⁹⁸ FRANCISCO DE QUEVEDO VILLEGAS. *Política de Dios, Gobierno de Cristo*. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1945, pp. 389-390. Two pages of anthology in which the reactions of the apostles in the absence of Jesus are described.

⁹⁹ Cf. BONIFACIO FERNÁNDEZ. *Líderes en relación*, VidRel, 112 (2012), pp. 64-71. To see the USG and the UISG conferences, cf. the website of «Vidimus Dominum». Cf. also HENRI J. M. NOUWEN. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, LifeWay Press; Revised edition (2015); *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, Image/ Random House LLC; 1st edition, 2013; C. GENE WILKES. *Jesus on Leadership, Becoming a Servant Leader*, Life Way Press (1996); JIM COTÉ. *El liderazgo de Jesús*. Lima: Ed. Puma, 2001; TED ENGSTROM and PAUL CEDAR. *Compassionate Leadership*, Baker Books/ Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2011.

God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance” (Phil 2:5-7). Once again, the language, here through two particles, highlights for us *proximity*.

1. “*I am among you ...*”

Not before you, and even less above you, or simply with you, but “*among*” you. Dialogical thinking highlights the value of this particle to show that the relationship between two people is not merely cognitive, like the way we know things and, by analogy, apply it to the knowledge of others. The “among” is the sphere in which another self, different and external to us, requests our same destiny. This particle wants to express the consistency of the encounter between people, their reciprocal relationships. When Jesus says that he is “among” his disciples, he is pointing out the close connection that exists between him and them. Proximity acquires maximum depth and range.

Matthew insists on “among” you. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:25-28).

The “among” reveals the deep bonds of the members of the apostolic community and of the members of the Christian community and discards any hint of individualism and collectivism. Jesus is among people he respects in their freedom. Jesus does the washing of the feet while Judas is with the apostles (“Not all of you are clean” Jn 13:11).

This “among you” evokes the closeness, the proximity, and the value of daily life in sharing the word and bread. The dinners, the meals of Jesus are acts and are signs with which he dignifies each moment of living together with his disciples and opens the mystery of the Kingdom. He lived in the present by distributing his time between his relationships with the Father, with the disciples, with the sick, with the outcast and with his friends.

2. ... *as one who serves.*”

Jesus is among his disciples *as one who serves*. Many times, we focus our attention on service and do it well because it is the way to express perfect leadership based on humility and generosity. Jesus did not simply act as a servant, rather he became a servant (Phil 2:5-11). “*I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do*” (Jn 13:15). We also have to give our lives for our brothers and sisters (cf. 1 Jn 3:16). “*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another*” (Jn 13:34).

We have indicated that no one who suffers a need goes unnoticed before Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. His shepherding is always concerning people and he does it, as indicated by Saint Peter: “*not by constraint but willingly*” (1 Pe 5:2) and in favor of others. In this exhortation, Peter speaks to the priests - the leaders of the Christian community - about *tending the flock*, which is synonymous with “shepherding.” Shepherding refers directly to the *people* more than the tasks. It gives more importance to people than to structures. *The flock*,

*the people, belongs to God. Compassionate leaders help the one and only Shepherd, who gives his life for the sheep (cf. Jn 10). In the religious community, nobody stands as a leader thinking of themselves, of their own benefit, but loving and serving their brothers and sisters.*¹⁰⁰

In the person of Jesus everything is listening, receiving, and fulfilling the will of the Father. By his obedience he was able to reunite mankind and form the family of God.

Some exegetes consider that the particle "as" is a sign of identity of the Christian life. In the Gospel of St. John, the word "as" has two meanings: one has a comparative character and the other causative.¹⁰¹ The first focuses on imitation and the second, on the origin and strength that makes possible the love lived by Jesus and communicated to his disciples. The love of Christ is not only a model to be imitated, but also the capacity for us to love others. Christians love from the love that Jesus has for us. In the First Letter of Saint John it is said: "Whoever claims to abide in him ought to live [just] as he lived" (1 Jn 2:6).

By reviewing the Gospel of John, we can appreciate the relationship between the Father and the Son and the Son with his followers. Everything has its source in the Father as fully gift. Jesus is the path of arrival and the path of return. We are wrapped up in the gratuitousness and reciprocity that the Father and the Son maintain. Here are some texts: *Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me (6:57). What I say, I say as the Father told me (12:50). As I have loved you, so you also should love one another (13:34). As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love (15:9). Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are (17:11b). They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world (17:16). As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world (17:18). As the Father has sent me, so I send you (20:21).*

In many constitutional texts the double imitative and causal reference appears. Our founders and foundresses asked us to look to Jesus as servant, teacher and shepherd and imitate his relationship with the Father and with mankind in service. But also, if we examine his life, in the immense majority there is a transformation that for his sons and daughters becomes a spiritual journey. They themselves are icons of that fundamental and causative "as." It is common to find in the writings of the founders' last years, allusions to the Pauline texts: "For to me life is Christ" (Phil 1:21). "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

The words of Jesus: "I am among you as the one who serves" shed light on the way of being and on the disposition with which leaders - superiors - have to develop in service to the

¹⁰⁰ It is enough to recall St. Augustine's sermon 46 about shepherds. St. Thomas of Villanova, commenting on the Gospel of St. John about the Good Shepherd, said: "There are four conditions that the good shepherd must meet. In the first place, love: it was precisely charity that was the only virtue that the Lord demanded of Peter to give him the care of his flock. Then, vigilance, to be attentive to the needs of the sheep. In the third place, doctrine, in order to feed men, to bring them to salvation. And, finally, the sanctity and integrity of life. This is the principal virtue" (cf. second reading of the Office of the Liturgy of the Hours on his feast day).

¹⁰¹ More broadly and beautifully developed by FRANCISCO CONTRERAS MOLINA, CMF, "*Para que tengan vida*". Folleto sin fecha, editado por la Prefectura de Formación de Bética. Sevilla 2004, pp. 92-94.

community. Loving to the extreme is the sign of the specific leadership of those who govern a religious community.

What a loving attitude St. Augustine reveals: “These are Your servants, my brethren, those whom You wish to be Your sons; my masters, whom You have commanded me to serve, if I desire to live with and of You.”¹⁰² And wise advice from the Pope to the Superiors General: “May you always know how to exercise authority by accompanying, understanding, helping and loving; by embracing every man and every woman, especially people who feel alone, excluded, barren, on the existential margins of the human heart. Let us keep our gaze fixed on the Cross: there is found any authority in the Church, where the One who is the Lord becomes a servant to the point of the total gift of himself.”¹⁰³

3. CHARISMATIC AND INSTITUTIONAL PRESENCE

The religious community, like the Church, is charismatic and institutional at the same time.¹⁰⁴ They are two inseparable dimensions. They do not oppose each other. They are governed by the principle of incarnation, which is the principle of donation and revelation, of communication and fraternity. The good leader harmonizes them with dexterity from the realism of grace and the history of salvation.

1. Charismatic Presence

In communities where everyone is full of grace and have been called, their leaders must relive the gift that they have inside, the potential received in the same vocation. Their energy comes from the inside. When this is activated, the skills and techniques help but do not substitute.¹⁰⁵

Today we are prone to admire men or women with special gifts to lead political groups, trade unions, academics; even ecclesial and religious communities. But here, when we talk about *charismatic leadership*,¹⁰⁶ it is from an *experience of grace, of fraternity* to encourage, accompany, discern, choose, decide, confirm, and to anticipate, organize, delegate and evaluate.

This *experience of grace* changes the viewpoint from that indicated by Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu, Francesco Alberoni and many other authors who speak of leadership, and proposes thinking from the perspective of what is a charism in the Church. It is difficult for superiors to be elected without having discovered in themselves the characteristics of charismatic leaders; without

¹⁰² SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book X, 4:6.

¹⁰³ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the Superiors General*, May 8, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. SC 2.

¹⁰⁵ I consider it useful to read the book of JUANMA ROCA, *El líder que llevas dentro*, Ed. Alienta, Barcelona, 2012. That spiritual energy is belief and conviction; it is internal control and not simply things that have to be done. The author is inspired by the Ignatian model and method of conversion and authentication of the person. The inner spiritual energy is the guarantee of consistency and the antidote of corruption.

¹⁰⁶ “The expression ‘charismatic leader’ was used for the first time by the sociologist Max Weber to refer to the leaders who emerge out of nothing, from the *nascent state* of a movement, in whom their followers recognize extraordinary properties. They have the ability to make themselves heard, they know how to keep the people of the group united, they set concrete goals, and they articulate the expressions of order and arouse enthusiasm and passion. From there they shape and guide the movement and transform it into an institution capable of lasting.” FRANCESCO ALBERONI. *El arte de liderar*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2003, pp. 31-32.

their brothers or sisters not being aware of their capacity to develop an adequate and intense pedagogy of communion and mission with high ideals and strong demands.¹⁰⁷ Within the communities the people are chosen who are in tune with the charism of the founders and try to unfold that charism in time, who love their project of evangelical life, who view the other members as brothers and sisters and are able to establish among them a true fraternity, sign and announcement of Jesus.

From the period immediately following the council, it was clearly stated that the charism of a superior does not exist. God helps superiors in their service as he helps their subjects in obedience. And, since there is no charism inherent in their position, the personal qualities are what count and through which they can inspire and accompany others. Hence the need to cultivate talents for service.

The presence of *charismatic leaders* is a *remembering* of the gift received, which is evangelizing mission. They remember the new commandment and solidarity with the poor. In their lives the brothers and sisters are made present who seek, like them, the will of God. They share the same project and they point to the future horizon that, all together, they must reach.

Charismatic leadership *grows* when there is recognition of the gift, of creative fidelity and of the prophetic and compassionate work of the servant. It is as if what Jesus said to St. Catherine is being fulfilled in them: "Make yourself a channel and I will make myself a torrent." Which means letting God's call transform their hearts and make them sensitive to the reality of suffering. They grow in loneliness, distance, and listening to the voices of men and women who cry out for so many spiritual and material needs. Leaders are affected by everything and nothing is foreign to them. Between listening and answering, they weave their service of communion. Hence the benefit of redeeming their interior life, of cultivating their roots, of being free, of reliving the experience of the founders, of knowing how to listen and of caring for spiritual empathy. The interaction, the reciprocity, of which we have spoken, is inherent in their service. They do not have to be in the center - the center is occupied by Jesus - but they have to be a converging point that gives play to relationships and that everyone "be present" not only physically and spiritually, but in a participatory and co-responsible way.

The presence of charismatic leaders persuades through their integrity in living the values they profess. They are transparent and consistent. They leave out the exterior details and underline who they are and what they are for; that is, they do not lose their direction (vision) and they exercise their responsibility.

2. Institutional Presence

On the other hand, every religious institute is a community organized within the coordinates of space and time, in history, and is governed by some Constitutions, which are the

¹⁰⁷ "Government is at the basis of our fraternity. It forms us as brothers, free to be 'useful for the salvation of souls.' When we accept a brother into the Order we express our confidence that he will be capable of taking his place in the government of his community and province, and that he will contribute to our debates and help us to arrive at and implement fruitful decisions." TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, O.P. *Dominican Freedom and Responsibility: Towards a Spirituality of Government* (May 10, 1997).

project of evangelical life according to the founding charism. Within them there is a part dedicated to governance and it talks about the superiors at all levels, who are the leaders of the communities. In this framework is where *institutional leadership* is found. Superiors, when elected or appointed, represent the community in their respective spheres. They are neither decorative vases nor are they the lords and owners of the community (local, provincial or congregational), but rather they are the servants of all their brothers or sisters and the animators of the mission entrusted to them. They do not have to do everything, but they make sure that which holds the community together and disposes it for a fruitful mission is done.

It is common to go to the paragraphs of the Constitutions to see what are the rights and obligations of superiors – leaders – to be elected or appointed. Superiors also review these paragraphs to do a self-examination. There are few who realize that it is the fundamental constitution which describes the origins and charismatic features of the vocation and mission of the institute and that all members have to live. In these paragraphs is found the vision that leaders have to keep alive and it is only by taking into account the origins and the purpose, that what it means to be a brother among brothers or sister among sisters and servant of all is captured. Leadership is exercised by combining the short view and the long view, discerning the challenges in spaces and times, and keeping the transmission belts active in the different spheres and levels of governance.

The value of the presence of charismatic and institutional leaders - superiors - can be appreciated:

1) In their dealing with people, according to the attitudes and content described in two canons of the Law, which say: “they are to govern their subjects as sons or daughters of God. And promoting the voluntary obedience of their subjects with reverence for the human person, they are to listen to them willingly and foster their common endeavor for the good of the institute and the Church, but without prejudice to the authority of superiors to decide and prescribe what must be done” (CIC, c. 618). And as for the contents: “Superiors are to devote themselves diligently to their office and together with the members entrusted to them are to strive to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ. They are to nourish the members regularly with the food of the word of God and are to draw them to the celebration of the sacred liturgy. They are to be an example to them in cultivating virtues and in the observance of the laws and traditions of their own institute; they are to meet the personal needs of the members appropriately, solicitously to care for and visit the sick, to correct the restless, to console the faint of heart, and to be patient toward all” (CIC, c. 619).

2) In the institutional sphere, leaders – superiors – remember the rights and duties of individuals and institutions so that harmony and well-being reign in the evangelical and evangelizing community. The spiritual life, apostolate, vocation ministry, formation, and economy suppose a plan, budgets, and an evaluation. Attention to material and technical resources comes within the exercise of helping the community, which is intelligent and is in the process of ongoing formation. Leaders are companions on the journey who seek and promote cohesion and favor everything that people and the community as a whole need to achieve their objectives. Theirs is a presence that opens paths, encourages, redirects services, corrects and decides, knowing that they

are members of the community that embody human, evangelical, charismatic, ecclesial and social values.

Representing the community is to keep it open to hospitality and in communion with the local Church and social and civil institutions. The presence of leaders – superiors - is a sign and instrument of correlation for those who are linked to the community. If they are, at the same time, responsible for the mission, they cannot set aside their devotion to the laity, participants in this mission, and, of course, and the close relationship with the Shepherds of the Church. Shared mission is not something else that they have to take care of, but the expression of their devotion to the growth of a vocation whose identity is correlated with other vocations in the Church.

Obviously, the greater the responsibility of the people who make up the community, the more the presence of the people who govern it will pass by unnoticed. This is a principle that must be taken for granted in everything that is said in the following sections.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRESENCE OF THOSE WHO GOVERN

It is common to recommend that leaders *cultivate presence*. This expression, in those who speak of leadership in the spheres of politics, business, sports, and social movements, means their poise, external image, gestures, tone of voice, the warmth in their welcome, etc. And all this is good, but here, what we have been calling, "cultivating presence" is to cultivate the interior life, consistency, compassionate relationships, listening, welcoming, respect and, ultimately, that *proximity* which is full of wisdom.¹⁰⁸ Pope Francis tells us: "Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence."¹⁰⁹ This applies equally to a Shepherd in his particular church or a religious superior. Ministerial leaders have to 'smell like the sheep' and religious superiors have to smell like 'fraternity and mission.'

In recapitulating when we have spoken of presence with the intention of caring for and cultivating the presence of the superiors in the community, a few traits can be derived as consequences. Before pointing them out, it seems appropriate to remember three points: 1) The convenience of exorcising the leadership of all wishful thinking and Promethean attempts. 2) Religious superiors are marked by their charismatic vocation and their evangelizing mission which is prophetic and eschatological. 3) The characteristics of their presence carry implicitly and

¹⁰⁸ Wisdom is a gift of the Spirit that helps to see and anticipate, to thank, and inspire, to discern the signs of times and places and to make decisions according to the will of God. It is a gift that must be asked for in prayer. When I have spoken about wisdom in government, I have indicated these ten signs: 1. Knowing how to obey and serve. 2. Knowing how to love (pray, suffer, forgive) and create community. 3. Knowing how to see, listen, discern, and decide. 4. Knowing how to recognize, stimulate, and correct. 5. Knowing how to think, communicate, and provide. 6. Knowing how to remember, enlighten, and send. 7. Knowing how to delegate, coordinate, and accompany. 8. Knowing how to innovate, adapt, and rectify. 9. Knowing how to train and renew oneself. 10. Knowing how to promote, transfer, and cease." Published in AQUILINO BOCOS MERINO, *Tiempos de comunión y misión*, PCI, Madrid, 2008, p. 606.

¹⁰⁹ POPE FRANCIS. *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 259. CHRIS LOWNEY, author of *El liderazgo de los jesuitas*, has also published *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, Chicago Illinois, Loyola Press, 2013, where he summarizes, in these points, the keys to his leadership: "I will strive to know myself deeply. I will transcend myself to serve others. I will immerse myself in a complex world. I will step back for daily reflection. I will live fully in the present and revere my tradition. I will help to create the future," pp. 222-226.

actively the *reciprocity of presences*. Any characteristic of presence that stands out has its *correlation* in the brothers or sisters of the community. Everything points towards *proximity*, that is, towards compassion and solidarity with the members of the community and with all those who need it, whoever that may be.

We have previously analyzed the context of challenges and opportunities in which those who exercise the service of the governance in consecrated life are immersed. The characteristics¹¹⁰ which are spoken of below of the presence of those who govern entail a good dose of utopia. They are hardly going to be found in the same person, but when they are cultivated, there is quality of presence and, consequently, of governance. That is, they help improve the service. In the attempt is found the synergy of those who are called to be a choir that sings the new song, of which St Augustine spoke,¹¹¹ and to form a body for the evangelizing mission.

1. Presence of a Moved Disciple

Perhaps it would be more correct to say: presence of a fellow moved disciple. Leaders are disciples of Jesus, but with their brothers or sisters they are fellow disciples. The mission that leaders receive in consecrated life comes forth in their thinking, feeling, and desires. In solitude and in prayer, they turn their gaze towards Jesus and his Mother. All those who suffer and hope gather at the foot of the cross. Gradually they discover that, Jesus also opens their eyes and ears and teaches them to discern the signs of the times. They take the Word of God as their source of truth and life. The journey of Jesus' life in poverty and love for the needy is their own journey. They are disciples who learn *to be one of many* and who are in the midst of the community *as ones who serve*. And they learn it as fellow disciples.

I stress being "moved" because there is an alteration that changes their lives. Their presence remains open to the interpellations of their brothers or sisters who aspire to holiness; of the communities with their cultural and social contexts in which they find themselves; of the laity and the Shepherds. They feel moved by poverty, by injustices, by ailments, by the cry of the mother earth,¹¹² and by the aspirations or dreams of peace and reconciliation.

Leaders are always learning and express it with humility and simplicity. Pope Francis does this, always remaining low, at the same height as the others. We need only review his most striking gestures when he was elected Bishop of Rome and in the years of his pontificate.

In consecrated life, leaders, followers of Jesus, look for the other shore and stand on the peripheries. They dialogue with the peripheries where God has his children, his brothers and sisters

¹¹⁰ Can they be called virtues? Yes, provided that it is understood that "virtue extends through the whole of existence, as a harmony that gathers it into unity. And it also ascends to God, or rather it descends from Him." ROMANO GUARDINI, *Learning the Virtues: That Lead You to God*, 1998 edition, Sophia Institute Press, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, p. 11.

¹¹¹ "Sing with your voices, your hearts, your lips, and your lives: *Sing to the Lord a new song*. Now it is your unquestioned desire to sing of him whom you love, but you ask me how to sing his praises. You have heard the words: *Sing to the Lord a new song*, and you wish to know what praises to sing. The answer is: *His praise is in the assembly of the saints*; it is in the singers themselves. If you desire to praise him, then live what you express. Live good lives, and you yourselves will be his praise," SAINT AUGUSTINE. *Sermons* (Sermon 34, 1-3.5-6; CCL 41, 424-426).

¹¹² Everything that is said in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015) affects them.

who, sometimes, are not recognized by others. They look for the other shore where the Spirit moves demanding compassionate presence in the face of pain and loneliness and before those who need their daily bread and new signs to believe and hope.

In the first place I emphasize this presence of the moved disciple because the other types of presence are touched by this first condition, although it goes without saying. It is the presumption, the foundation of the others.

2. Presence that Reveals the Preeminence of the Person over the Function

It is the presence of leaders – superiors – which brings the “who” to the foreground and relegates the function, effectiveness, and results to the background. It reveals their mystery, identity, rootedness, and strength. They may seem fragile in their appearances, but they are firmly grounded in the Gospel values they believe and transmit. They have been seasoned in the exercise of freedom and responsibility. They are not superhero figures, but they are centered and willing to grow together with their brothers and sisters. They do not wear masks. They are transparent in their intentions and attitudes. They show, without needing to demonstrate it, the consistency between vocation and mission and this is how they can speak and act with authority. Their inevitable shadows are illuminated by their theological lives. They show they are authentic in their self-criticism and acceptance of their limits. Far from lowering their self-esteem, it grows because they recognize that the strength of communion comes from above.

Narcissism does not fit them nor believing themselves to be irreplaceable. They reject self-referentiality.¹¹³ They know that they provide a temporary service and, like the useless servant, they do what they have to do (cf. Lk 17:10). On the other hand, they avoid being “tempted to cave in and to consider every effort for improving the situation useless” and “the danger of becoming managers of the routine, resigned to mediocrity, restrained from intervening, no longer having the courage to point out the purposes of authentic consecrated life and running the risk of losing the love of one's first fervor and the desire to witness to it.”¹¹⁴

Here is what I suggested before: there are those who captivate with their looks, with their voices, with their smiles and glances and, after a while, they disappoint. They are empty inside. On the other hand, those who appear irrelevant, in time, are highly appreciated for their inner wealth. The same can be said of looking at places or situations. There are those who are not fit for one position and rise to an extraordinary human and spiritual height in another. It is the principle of the right person for the right post.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Which has been strongly denounced by Pope Francis. I share these two quotes: “The other is the self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past” (EG, 94). “In others, this spiritual worldliness lurks behind a fascination with social and political gain, or pride in their ability to manage practical affairs, or an obsession with programmes of self-help and self-realization” (EG, 95).

¹¹⁴ Cf. SAO, 28.

¹¹⁵ It is a criterion that the bishop has to take into account in his governance. “In conferring offices within the diocese (...) he should look first of all to the good of souls, respecting the dignity of persons and making use of their talents in the most appropriate and beneficial way, in the service of the community, always assigning the right person to the right post.” Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, “Apostolorum successores,” n. 61.

3. Presence of Missionary Communion

This type of presence shows its ability to convene and connect. The first mission of those who present themselves in a community group is to be a sign of unity and a bond of missionary communion. We are not talking here about what they have to do, but about their way of being and their expression. They live from the perspective of communion and they make communion effective. They point to the Trinitarian mystery, to the commandment of love, to the nascent Church and to the original community of the institute. Body, mind, and heart are oriented towards the encounter, welcoming and walking together. The presence of missionary communion lengthens and broadens universal fraternity. It has no borders.

The figure of the superior who appeared solemn and who had to be venerated has changed. Now, not only do they shake hands, but also they embrace their brother or sister. They are altruistic, always friendly, and befriending. They evoke the presence of those who are legitimately absent.

The presence of missionary communion is always attentive to the challenges of the new evangelization. It is the presence of the witness and the apostle, the prophet and the missionary. They are sensitive to the needs of the dejected and those left outside of the path; of the marginalized, who are not lacking in the communities. They embrace racial, cultural, ideological, age, and health differences. They do not shy away from conflicts. They face them according to truth, love and justice. They recognize everything positive and try to integrate it. Therefore, they encourage direct communication, without schemes or deception. This is how spontaneous and enriching dialogue arises and the channels of collaboration are fostered.

Leaders express their missionary vision by opening horizons, promoting projects, making daring proposals, and *walking* with others.

4. Presence that Overflows with Gratitude and Arouses Involvement

In this characteristic, love and service interchange with each other. At the foundation is gratitude because God loves us first. Those who find themselves present *among their brothers or sisters as servants* - in the style of Jesus and the founders - must reveal the love they have received with gratitude. Saint Paul says "we have this ministry through the mercy shown us" (2 Cor 4:1). Gratitude is the seat of obedience and service. It is the starting point for a governance in the presence of God and of the brothers and sisters.

The complete example is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the woman of complete gratitude and praise. She personifies grateful love and swiftness in service. She combines poverty and freedom. She receives the greeting of the angel, accepts the mission that is entrusted to her and runs to see her cousin Elizabeth who is in need. There is amazement, receptivity, and surrender in her. Already in the house of Elizabeth and Zachariah, she proclaims the greatness of the Lord because he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness. She sings the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-56).

The grateful presence is an inclusive presence of all the members of the community - of the "we" - with their particular experiences that are crucial to building future options. Approaching others from the perspective of gratitude is to travel the longest stretch on the path toward encounter. In gratitude there is a special inclusive strength. Those who present themselves with stories told

through gratuitousness and gratitude gather and involve others.¹¹⁶ Unquestionably in the presence lies the spiritual, pastoral, and formative journey of those who are elected or appointed as superiors. The electors, who name them, look upon their qualities. But it is a starting point, not a conquest, because all identity is dynamic and correlative. Any election or appointment implies a trust that has to be accredited by the consistency between what is expected of those chosen and the achievement of the objectives.

Being exemplary is to cry out in society and in the Church.¹¹⁷ Transparency radiates from the inside to the outside. They have nothing to hide. They are signs of honesty, clarity and a clean heart. Half-truths, confusion, and duplicity are pernicious. Hypocrisy is deleterious and corruption is condemned. The Lord likes true sincerity (cf. Ps 51:8). It does not mean that those who govern cannot be mistaken, but the only errors that are tolerated are those committed by human limitation and not by unclean interests. Honesty generates accessibility. Like Jesus, who is the Truth, they adopt truthfulness as the way of life; they make truth and tell the truth. Authenticity and consistency between what they say and do are a guarantee of discernment and decisions. That was the secret of “by what authority do you speak?” (cf. Lk 4:31-37).

The involvement of leaders contributes to the involvement of others. When speaking of presence that is implied and implies, it refers to that immersion in the doubts, sorrows, sufferings, and joys of the people and the community. Getting involved is more than feeling affected and offering a word of support. It is to kneel and wash the feet (cf. Jn 13:1-15); is to serve at the table (cf. Mt 24:42-46); is to feed, drink, dress, visit, etc. (cf. Mt 25:34-46); is to open the door to the inopportune friend (Lk 11:5-13); it is to kiss the leper.¹¹⁸ Their example pulls others along and makes the other do the same.

5. Presence of Those Who Are Free and Dedicated, Who Keep Watch and Announce the Rising Light

In people who are free, there is a hint of the resurrection. Now, without blindfolds or ties, they can walk with their brothers and sisters of the community. They will always be open to the new and welcome what comes to them as an opportunity to confirm, encourage, and guide the mission of the community with joy. Without a doubt, “there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us

¹¹⁶ See the importance that HOWARD GARDNER gives to the leader's story. Cf. *Mentes líderes. Una anatomía del liderazgo*, Paidós, Barcelona, 2011, p. 376. [For English edition see HOWARD E. GARDNER, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.]

¹¹⁷ Cf. JAVIER GOMÁ LANZÓN. *Ejemplaridad pública*. Madrid: Taurus, 2010; Id., *Imitación y experiencia*. Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2003.

¹¹⁸ Celano, in the *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*, says: “But when now by the grace and power of the Highest he was beginning to think of holy and profitable things, one day, while still in the habit of the world, he met a leper, and, having become stronger than himself, went near and kissed him.” *Escritos completos de San Francisco de Asís y biografías de su época*. Madrid: BAC, 1949, pp. 296-297. For an English edition of his works see: ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI and Z. EL BEY, *The Complete Writings of St. Francis of Assisi: with Biography*, Scotts Valley, California, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009.

wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!"¹¹⁹

Freedom is a gift and those who possess it create, consciously or unconsciously, closeness and trust. They eliminate all fear, all division, and make friends. Those who love and live the truth and fight for justice are free. They become examples of self-assurance. The presence of free people creates a happy, responsible, and hopeful community.

The surrender to which I refer is something more than a gesture or a specific service. It is being-for-others. It begins to be recognized in the ability to welcome those who are different and attend to them from the point of view of the other. Each person wants to be accepted and recognized according to his or her own personality. Listening is an indication of inner maturity and desirable empathy. "To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive while, to welcome, to accept. Listening is much more than allowing another to talk waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you."¹²⁰

Freedom becomes receptivity and surrender (generosity) which express the double movement of the Christian life. Only those who have emptied themselves and receive the gift of God are receptive and only those who allow themselves to be filled overflow. The presence of leaders who have taken part in this movement of emptying and generosity manifests their capacity to share all good things and to combat all kinds of self-sufficiency and greed. An invaluable good is time. The use of time is the measure of the freedom and generosity of leaders. Those who start by saying that they do not have time, are hindering and making proximity impossible.¹²¹ On the contrary, those who own themselves are owners of their time and, in the face of unforeseen events and the most urgent needs, they know how to prioritize, become flexible, and help to grow in adaptability and tolerance. Moreover, they make this saying come true: "He did everything for others, nothing for himself."¹²²

Good leaders do not leave things to improvisation. They plan and have a good measure of the passage of time inside them. They overcome slowness and speed. The benevolence with which

¹¹⁹ EG 280.

¹²⁰ HENRI J. M. NOUWEN. *El corazón como morada*. México: Lumen, 2001, pp. 16-17. [For the English version see *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, HarperOne/Harper Collins Publishers, 2006.]

¹²¹ In addition to the quality of presence, good governance determines *the good use of time*. Those who have a true north know how to dignify time, point out their priorities, and live the present time with inner peace. Cf. PABLO PERALTA ANSORENA. *Vivir a tiempo... Reflexiones en torno al misterio del tiempo*. Montevideo: Peralta, 2003; Aa.Vv. "Habitar el tiempo". *VidRel* (2007) n. monográfico, 5; JOSEP MARIA ESQUIROL. *El respirar de los días*, Paidós Contextos, Barcelona, 2009; GUILLERMO BALLEATO PRIETO. *Gestión del Tiempo. En busca de la eficacia*. Madrid: Pirámide, 2013.

¹²² This is from the epitaph engraved on the statue erected to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in Neuhof.

they look at and treat others makes them feel that they are masters of their time. While time passes, closeness and proximity are felt. There is no grimace of impatience, no hint of anxiety.¹²³

Many times, vigilance is equated with control. Good leaders *keep watch*, like the sentry scrutinizing the horizon, watching the movements between shadows and alert to nocturnal rustling. God watches over his people (Ex 13:21ff; 40:34-38; Num 15ff). He is always close. Saint Joseph watched over Jesus and Mary. To keep watch is to be vigilant so that nothing bad happens, so that you can walk in safety. It is a friendly presence that does not sleep and awaits the dawn. But it is also a messenger of the dawn, of new signs of life that appear with light.

6. *Inspiring, Creative, and Revitalizing Presence*

Three words that qualify the presence of the founders, men and women of the Spirit. These are decisive words that reveal the influence of the Spirit on them and on their followers.¹²⁴

The main gift that the Spirit gives to the founders, of which their sons and daughters participate, is that of the fruitfulness that is shown in the ability to convene, in the congregation of members and in the sharing of life and mission. All the creativity of the founders and their followers is connected with the creative force of the Spirit. A creativity that is put into action according to openness to the challenges of the reality of the environment and sharing with other brothers and sisters. The initiatives, organization, and structures are the results and are means, but not ends, because creativity drives the continuous search for more appropriate methods and means in each time and place.¹²⁵

The light and energy of the institute's charism are still inspiring. Those who participate in it and have the mission to enlighten are called to offer a radiant and inspiring presence. The light - the vision - that they have received expands it. They are contagious and ignite others. It is not uncommon to be with superiors who, after a time of experience, give thanks for the mission of service and for the great wealth acquired.

¹²³ As if they have internalized the message of the famous poem by Henry Van Dyke: "Time is / Too Slow for those who Wait, / Too Swift for those who Fear, / Too Long for those who Grieve, / Too Short for those who Rejoice; / But for those who Love, / Time is not." See HENRY VAN DYKE – *poems*, Classic Poetry Series, Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive. 2012.

¹²⁴ "The very *charism* of the *Founders* appears as an *experience of the Spirit*, (ET 11) transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. It is *for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church* (LG 44; cf. CD 33; 35, 1, 2, etc.)." MR 11. It is to be noted that the CIC gathers this doctrine in canons 576, 578, 586. Also, VC, FLC, SAfC, SAO. In the Letter from the CICLSAL, *Keep Watch!* (September 2014) there is an explanation of the process followed in the Magisterium of the Church on the charismatic and prophetic dimension of it, n. 5.

¹²⁵ MIGUEL ÁNGEL MILLÁN ASÍN. *Liderazgo y gestión. Lo que podemos aprender de los fundadores*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 2013. In this work, the author deals with how the founders have been creative in the groups they served, in the focus of their services, in the means they used and in the universality of their projects breaking down barriers and going to the most distant places. Their creative and innovative capacity is linked to their connection with reality and their willingness to serve, to intelligent organizations, to communication, cooperation and coordination with other ecclesial sectors, to the commitment to perfection and continuous improvement, to dismantling and openness to new challenges and, ultimately, having placed the Creator God at the center of their lives (pp. 245-251).

The presence that reveals the origin and purpose of their proposals is inspiring. It is inspired and inspires according to the Beatitudes. From the perspective of the Beatitudes, they make their utopias clear and open new horizons of mission. They show their joy and their passion. From this perspective, the presence of the superiors in the midst of the community groups is creative and, spontaneously encourages them to carry forward what they have intuited to be best for the communities. The three traits - inspiration, creativity, and revitalizing impulse - are connected. Inspiration brings creativity and transformative impulse. To inspire, offering an exciting vision of the future, it is necessary to be inspired, that is, well-formed; just like to encourage, you need to be encouraged.

Although renewal is not something of one person, but is something of everyone (cf. PC 4), superiors are expected to foster initiatives, support those of others and dare to move forward promoting what has been proposed. It is more evident today, given the situation in which we find ourselves, in which we cannot leave things as they are (cf. EG 25). Sustained change and continuation of the *processes* of transformation depend on them.

Looking into the future translates what the Roman poet said into actions: "Plant trees for another generation to enjoy" (Caecilius Statius). The Arabs have another saying: "You have to plant date seeds for others to savor." The vision of the future entails fruitfulness.

7. Serene, Discerning, and Decisive Presence

Serenity has two different aspects. It is a gift as well as a task. Serenity does not depend only on one's will, but rather it is a gift. Peace, tranquility, and inner harmony are enjoyed because of the gift that has been received, but also because of the painstaking cultivation of interiority and training in overcoming adversity and pain. Serenity is the icon of the strong. In any case, "it is not other people or circumstances that cause us to be upset, but rather our own thoughts and attitudes about those people and circumstances that cause us distress" (Gerald G. Jampolsky, MD, Diane V. Cirincione, *Love Is the Answer: Creating Positive Relationships*, New York, Bantam Books, 1990. p. 3.). And Thomas à Kempis says: "Serenity is not freedom from the storm but finding peace amid the storm." St. John of the Cross in the *Dark Night of the Soul*, in his first two stanzas, ends with the verse: "My house being now at rest" and makes different comments according to the stage of purification or illumination.

Martin Heidegger, before his countrymen, spoke of serenity in these terms: "Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it."¹²⁶ An image that always draws us to understand serenity in the midst of disturbances and setbacks is that of the oak, to which Virgil referred¹²⁷ and to which Antonio Machado sung amazed:

¹²⁶ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Discourse on Thinking*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1969.

¹²⁷ "Oft-times around the aged strength of some stupendous oak the rival blasts of wintry Alpine winds smite with alternate wrath: load is the roar, and from its rocking top the broken boughs are strewn along the ground; but to the crag steadfast it ever clings; far as toward heaven its giant crest up rears, so deep below its roots reach down to

“What do you have,
 black oak of the countryside,
 with your colorless branches
 in a field without greenery,
 with your ash-black trunk,
 neither slender nor lofty,
 with your strength without pain,
 and your firm humility?”¹²⁸

The serene presence comes from those who are firm in their criteria, convictions, and commitments; they have ordered their feelings and affections and they are flexible. They savor life according to love.¹²⁹ Their well-being comes from the inside out, just like the trees whose roots nourish and sustain them. The well-rooted tree grows, it sways in the strong winds, but it does not fall. It is always there giving testimony of life. It is tolerant, it adapts according to the winds, but from a self-possession that is rooted and resistant. But this is only one aspect, because serenity also implies allowing oneself to be penetrated by closeness and giving closeness to one's entire surrounding reality, like Jesus did in the incarnation, in his life and, especially, at the time of the cross. His seven last words, pronounced after much silence in suffering, express the most profound closeness with those who hope for salvation.¹³⁰

Leadership has to face adversities. Leaders experience their vulnerability and have to exercise *resilience*, which is “*the ability to be well even when things go wrong.*” They must be able to return to their usual way of being after being subjected to strong pressures. At the very least, they must resist conformism and discouragement and forge positive, vital community behavior in the face of adversity.¹³¹ In Psalm 23 they have a guide to live in serenity: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Serenity allows them to confront conflicts with purpose. They have a great capacity for *discerning*. Because of our human condition, we are in permanent conflict. “To be born is to enter into conflict” (Marc Oraison). Conflict dwells inside people, in their interpersonal relationships

Tartarus.” VIRGIL and ROBERT DERYCK WILLIAMS (ed.), *The Aeneid*, 2nd Edition, Bristol Classical Press; 2009.

¹²⁸ ANTONIO MACHADO, *Campos de Castilla, The Landscape of Castile*, translated by Mary G. Berg, New York, White Pine Press, 2005, p. 55.

¹²⁹ “A sound choice includes key characteristics. For one thing, the decision must make sense; I can articulate a logical case that coincides with my mission and values. But when ‘this makes sense’ aligns with ‘I’m at peace about what I have to do,’ we feel confirmed in our decision and emboldened to move forward. When, in contrast, anxiety continues to gnaw at us, we hang back, our inner disquiet a cue to revisit our thought process.” CHRIS LOWNY, *Francisco, líder y papa*, Sal Terrae, Santander, 2014, p. 181 [For the English version see CHRIS LOWNY, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, Chicago Illinois, Loyola Press, 2013]. This reflection arises from what Pope Francis revealed about his inner state during the conclave as the votes were being counted and his impending election got closer. “He was struck that he ‘did not lose peace at any moment’ even though he knows that he is ‘of the kind that gets worried, that gets upset.’ He interpreted that peace as a powerfully affirming signal” (id., p. 180).

¹³⁰ Cf. LADISLAO BOROS. *Encontrar a Dios en el hombre*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1971, pp. 137-153.

¹³¹ Cf. ÁNGEL CASTIÑEIRA-JOSEP M. LOZANO. *El poliedro del liderazgo*. Barcelona: Libros de Cabecera, 2012, pp. 171-172; SANTIAGO ÁLVAREZ DE MON. *Desde la adversidad. Liderazgo, cuestión de carácter*. Madrid: Pearson, Madrid, 2012.

(groups and communities) and in their ties with institutions (structures). Human history is full of conflicts.¹³² And these are only resolved with an overabundance of love, not only through techniques and strategies. The greatest conflict and imbalance are between God and the sinful man while Jesus, giving his life, reconciled us.

If people show a serene presence, it is because they have overcome fears and they are above all threats. They have overcome the temptations of ambition, envy, greed, and emotional possession. They have mastered anger and distrust. They thus become good mediators of peace. They can make the words of the psalm their own: "Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss. Truth will spring from the earth; justice will look down from heaven" (Ps 85:11-12).

We are faced with new scenarios that ask for patient and silent discernment in order to denounce all slavery and announce the reign of truth and justice. At this moment, consecrated life feels urged to innovate lifestyles and structures that bear witness to the Gospel of joy. It does not seek change out of snobbery. If a more appropriate reorganization is proposed and attempted, it is in order to live more faithfully its charism in the Church and to foster new missionary commitments in the peripheries. Serenity, in this effort of discernment, asks us not to lose sight of the horizon, and for boldness and perseverance.

It is obvious, that serenity, discernment, and resolve are intertwined. Serenity is the cornerstone on which discernment and resolve lean. It recalls the fatherhood of God which guides men in the search for his will.¹³³ The serenity of the superiors is, above all, the fruit of their obedience to God, the center of their lives, and, from it, they can understand and cooperate in order to discern and decide. Today, people refuse to use the word "decide," but it is an integral part of the exercise of leadership. What needs to be reviewed is the way of deciding. But, after due consultation, leaders must act. The searching, consultation, dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility qualify the decision. The decision comes, thus, charged with quality and adherence.

Today, with the inevitable need to revise positions, restructure larger organizations, and situate ourselves in the peripheries with new commitments, there can be a certain nervousness in the communities. This situation, which is not easy to face and to assume, postulates serene and not hasty leaders to value, ponder and decide. It requires the elimination of all confusion when it comes to seeking and receiving the greatest good and serene boldness to adopt the appropriate means and methods for the decision.¹³⁴ However difficult it may be, we must try with perseverance, to combine conviction and responsibility in the face of the challenges of the mission entrusted to us.

8. Compassionate Presence Which Recreates the Covenant

¹³² GIUSEPPE CREA. *Diagnosi dei conflitti interpersonali nelle comunità e nei gruppi*. Bologna: EDB, 2006.

¹³³ "In community life which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each individual engages in a fruitful dialogue with the others in order to discover the Father's will. At the same time, together they recognize in the one who presides an expression of the fatherhood of God and the exercise of authority received from God, at the service of discernment and communion." VC 92.

¹³⁴ "True love for the community is really what makes persons in authority able to reconcile firmness and patience, listening to each one, and the courage to make decisions, overcoming the temptation to be deaf and mute." (SAO 20, f)

It is the presence of those who feel compassion and love deeply. Only those who relive the feelings of love of Jesus, compassionate leader¹³⁵ and author of the new covenant, experience it. And it is only recognized by those who open their hearts and allow themselves to be challenged by the Word of God and by human suffering. Superiors with compassionate presence live and endeavor for the brothers and sisters to give priority to the Lord who calls them together and speaks to them through Jesus, who is in their midst, and promotes fidelity to the covenant.¹³⁶

In consecrated life today the covenant has become a strong central category,¹³⁷ which has so many echoes in the Old Testament and it acquires fullness in the person of Jesus who with his life, death and resurrection opened the way of the New Covenant. The blood he shed is its seal. Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant of love and hope. In the covenant, the reciprocal relationships between God and us are sealed. It is not a legal agreement, but one of love. Jesus guarantees it by giving his body and blood and asks us to do this in memory of him. It is, then, a covenant that involves communion with all those who need us, and which is full of compassion.

Prophecy characterizes this type of presence. We have the icon of Elijah and *Vita consecrata* which remind us of it: “The Patristic tradition has seen a model of monastic religious life in Elijah, courageous prophet and friend of God. He lived in God's presence and contemplated his passing by in silence; he interceded for the people and boldly announced God's will; he defended God's sovereignty and came to the defense of the poor against the powerful of the world (cf. 1 Kg 18-19).”¹³⁸

Now, compassion is not static. It is not passive. It carries within itself a force that obliges those who feel compassion to forget about themselves and initiate a process of going forth and caring for the other; to share their concerns, their difficulties, and their worries. It implies, therefore, feeling affected and accompanying the one who suffers. Compassion moves towards the peripheries where the marginalized and the discarded are found. It prompts connection with people who have needs and sharing with them the struggle for their complete liberation. It does not conclude, then, with analysis and reasoning about the causes of suffering or exclusion or with pious consolation, but forces us to take decisive steps toward complete healing. Compassion is not perfect if we leave things as they are, if we do not remove obstacles and offer initiatives to overcome injustice, slavery and the loss of human dignity.

Father Lacordaire said: “In government, we must use firmness, no doubt, but also much flexibility, patience, and compassion.” Saint Paul felt what he carried inside and showed the value

¹³⁵ Let us review the text of the Letter to the Hebrews: “Therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested” (Heb 2:17-18).

¹³⁶ Cf. *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 6 and 7.

¹³⁷ The appeal to the covenant, from different angles, has been present in the post-conciliar Magisterium. These documents have dealt with this category: *Redemptionis donum*, *Potissimum institutioni*, *Vita consecrata*, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, *Keep Watch! and Contemplate*. Two authors: ÁNGEL APARICIO. *Inspiración bíblica de la vida consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2011, pp. 59-95; Id. “Alianza”. In: *Suplemento al Diccionario de Teología de la Vida Consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2005 and, most recently, JOSÉ C. R. GARCÍA PAREDES. *El encanto de la vida consagrada. Una alianza y tres consejos*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, pp. 13-44.

¹³⁸ VC 84. Also in *Keep Watch!*, n. 6.

of this compassionate presence with words of blessing and praise: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God” (2 Cor 1:3-4).

Being compassionate and living the covenant are two facets or attitudes of the life of every Christian. They are forces of community cohesion. They are cultivated in listening to the Word, in reconciliation, in the Eucharist and in constant contact with the suffering reality, which is part of the "sacramentum crucis" of everyday life. If leaders are asked to revive them, it is because this shows their closeness and verifies how proximity is exercised or mercy is practiced. They always have Mary just a prayer away, the ark of the new covenant. Mary "was the new Ark of the Covenant, before which the heart exults with joy, the Mother of God present in the world who does not keep this divine presence to herself but offers it, sharing the grace of God. Thus, — the prayer says — Mary really is the “causa nostrae laetitiae,” the “Ark” in whom the Saviour is truly present among us.”¹³⁹

From these assumptions it is easy to understand this comment: “When fidelity becomes more difficult, the individual must be offered the support of greater trust and deeper love, at both the personal and community levels. At such times, the sensitive closeness of the Superior is most essential. Great comfort can also come from the valuable help of a brother or sister, whose concerned and caring presence can lead to a rediscovery of the meaning of the covenant which God originally established, and which he has no intention of breaking” (VC 70).

9. Appropriate Presence. Where, When and How to Be Present

Benedict XVI recalled these words to the Superiors General: “*The service of authority* demands a persevering *presence*, able to enliven and take initiative, to recall the *raison d'être* of consecrated life, to help the persons entrusted to you to correspond with ever-renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁰

Unless for a greater cause, it seems obvious that the superiors are to be present as signs of communion and bonds of unity in the key moments of the lives of the people, and of the community, and its mission. For example, in welcoming vocations, in community celebrations - Eucharistic and penitential -, in times of prayer and community discernment, in the elaboration of community projects, in the last moments of life, in situations of illness, in moments of vocational crises, in those occasions in which we must help those who are discouraged or afraid of the future, etc. Greater proximity and special care are required by those who are faced with "difficult obedience,"¹⁴¹ those who confront an unexpected fate that radically changes their way of life or who believe they must change their state of life. These are delicate and decisive moments in which we must especially enliven our faith, pray a lot and offer support in patient discernment.

¹³⁹ BENEDICT XVI. *Homily for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Castel Gandolfo, (August 15, 2011).

¹⁴⁰ BENEDICT XVI. May 22, 2006. Published in the *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 31 May 2006, p. 13. This text was quoted in SAO, 13a.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, n. 26.

The appropriateness of the superiors' presence in a community is measured by the good that it can cause to each of the members, to the community as a whole and to the mission entrusted to them. Broadly speaking, it can be said that it is appropriate when the presence bears witness, communicates, unites, inspires, heals, transforms, and brings joy.¹⁴² Where there is something to recognize and be grateful for, to enlighten, to discern, or decide, they must be present, directly or indirectly. And their presence does not seem to be appropriate, if it is going to confuse and add stress, if it is going to create conflicts and bad moods or if it is going to create distrust and alienation. We enter the field of prudence, a virtue that is learned in being tactful, in reflection and the acceptance of setbacks. No one teaches us to be prudent, but life itself makes us realize when it is and when it is not appropriate to be present.

The characteristics mentioned above indicate *how to be*. It is not a matter of posing, of fiction, of pretending, but rather of superiors expressing themselves with all naturalness according to what they are on the inside. They are present as their true selves, consistent, free, kind, generous, spontaneous, a sight of new and hopeful life. The *how* also refers to time, that is, to look at each encounter as an important and sometimes decisive opportunity. That is the case when the Superiors General visits communities, especially in the institutes that are numerous, only once every six years or who preside over an assembly or a meeting one time.

The superiors, the leaders of the communities, with different proportions, depending on the local, provincial, or general levels, are expected to be seen in these three places: the chapel, the office, and the community room.

In the *chapel* they are to give thanks for their brothers and sisters, to pray and to continue renewing the acceptance of the mission they have received. By meditating on the Word of God and the writings of the founder, they renew their inspiration and motivation for service. Looking at the cross, looking at the tabernacle, looking at Mary, they learn that not everything depends on them and that there is a path to follow. In the chapel they assume, in silence, *suffering*. Suffering is something inherent to governance. Keeping in one's heart the observed limitations, the false interpretations, the slander ... this makes one suffer (cf. 2 Cor 4:7-12). But everything fits in prayer, because we live our history of salvation.

They are expected to be seen in the *office* to think, read, and plan. Both the chapel and the office are suitable places to prepare the constant reconciliation with their responsibility, with different people, with difficult people and with the people wounded by sin. In addition to the theoretical preparation, it is necessary to cultivate the interiorization of the charismatic values, to reserve time for the purification of intentions, to expand their hearts and to be trained for patient and merciful listening. It is very advisable to go from the chapel to the office and vice versa. A personal relationship with Jesus and fraternal relationships are found in between. At stake is the missionary dynamism of the communities or the Institutes, which implies carrying out new responses to the multiple forms of poverty, initiating new processes or carrying out the reorganization of presences and services.

¹⁴² Pope Francis says something that is also valid for superiors: "In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze" (EG 169).

They are also expected to be seen in the *community room*. In many homes of men and women religious a special place is reserved for community. It is the place of formal and informal gatherings. It is an area where one feels and enjoys hospitality, where exclusion is eliminated, where the dialogue that has been interrupted is restored, where differences are contrasted and the extremes in different points of view are filed down. Perhaps it is the space that sees the most contradictions and reconciliations, serious reflections and relaxation, comments and secrets, distance and proximity. Within its bosom, leaders remember essential values and dispose their brothers and sisters to accept and answer the ultimate questions. They channel that immense good that is contained in the day to day, that is, daily life. If leaders are discreetly present in the community room, they can observe looks, tones of voice, and many kinds of gestures, which can give them clues about how to maintain proper fraternal relationships.

The religious community becomes a school of fraternity and of sensitive proximity in *daily life* where “verbs magnify the wisdom of action and names are debtors and pretenders of proximity. There is a great distance between addressing people in general and doing it by their proper name. Pronouncing their proper name is like looking into their eyes: at a certain moment you can only pronounce the name of a person or you can only look into the eyes of a person. Names are the linguistic modality of proximity.”¹⁴³ Indeed, experience says that pronouncing a proper name is like opening the door of intimacy. There is also great value found in sharing bread, listening to each other, being interested in each other, collecting glances and reactions and searching together. Exchanging experiences and points of view is to create bonds and enable solid commitments. It would be necessary to praise that kind of daily life that has no formalities, no dead silences, nor knows routine in order to understand how simple life is and how fruitful it has been in history, starting with Nazareth where the Gospel was created and where we can learn the culture of the moment.¹⁴⁴

10. *The Dark Shadow of Leaders*

It is the shadow of human limitation. Leaders also have defects and are exposed to temptation and sin. That is the dark side of people who govern, their black shadow. Therefore, presence is not always appropriate and can even be harmful. Above all, if an evil spirit has come to dwell in their hearts, for whatever reason. Often it is the ambition to dominate which is accompanied by arrogance and insolence. The evil spirit is diabolic, that is, a force that disorients, confounds, separates, divides, and sows mistrust. When evil spirits appear, it is best to prudently

¹⁴³ JOSEP MARÍA ESQUIROL, *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad*, Acontilado, Barcelona, 2015, p. 73.

¹⁴⁴ “We will reflect upon a distinctive quality of family life which is learned in the very first years of life: conviviality, in other words the attitude of sharing life’s goods and being happy to be able to do so. Sharing and knowing how to share is a precious virtue! Its symbol, its ‘icon’, is the family gathered around the dinner table. The sharing of meals — and thus, in addition to food, also of affection, of stories, of events — is a common experience. (...) Conviviality is a sure barometer for measuring the health of relationships: if in a family something has gone awry, or there is some hidden wound, it is immediately understood at the table. A family that hardly ever eats together, or that does not talk at the table but watches television, or looks at a smartphone, is a ‘barely familial’ family. When children are engrossed with a computer at the table, or a mobile phone, and do not talk to each other, this is not a family, it is like a boarding house.” POPE FRANCIS. *General audience*, November 11, 2015. Cf. BENJAMÍN GONZÁLEZ BUELTA. *Letra pequeña. Cotidianidad infinita*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 2015.

avoid the moments of encounter. In the end, silence, prayer, and penance expel every evil spirit. Leaders have to reconcile with themselves, with their mission in humility and service for unity, fraternity and the evangelizing mission. Humility helps perceive the warnings of frenzy and self-sufficiency.

We have a description of the temptations, risks, and falls in Pope Francis' speech to the Roman Curia. I transcribe the 15 statements: 1) The disease of thinking we are "immortal," "immune" or downright "indispensable," neglecting the need for regular check-ups. 2) Another disease is the "Martha complex," excessive busy-ness. 3) Then too there is the disease of mental and spiritual "petrification." 4) The disease of excessive planning and of functionalism. 5) The disease of poor coordination. 6) There is also a "spiritual Alzheimer's disease." It consists in losing the memory of our personal "salvation history," our past history with the Lord and our "first love" (Rev 2:4). 7) The disease of rivalry and vainglory. 8) The disease of existential schizophrenia. This is the disease of those who live a double life. 9) The disease of gossiping, grumbling, and back-biting. 10) The disease of idolizing superiors. This is the disease of those who court their superiors in the hope of gaining their favor. 11) The disease of indifference to others. This is where each individual thinks only of himself and loses sincerity and warmth of human relationships. 12) The disease of a lugubrious face. Those glum and dour persons who think that to be serious we have to put on a face of melancholy and severity. 13) The disease of hoarding. 14) The disease of closed circles, where belonging to a clique becomes more powerful than belonging to the Body. 15) Lastly: the disease of worldly profit, of forms of self-exhibition.¹⁴⁵

Within these traits that the Pope explains with his usual evangelical meaning, there are other indicators of elongated shadows, for example, the manipulator, the blamer, the narcissist, the omnipresent, the indecisive (avoider), the suffocating, etc.¹⁴⁶ "If the dynamics of leadership teach us something, it is that evil is not out there, but rather *everyone has their own inner demons*. Lights and shadows, humility and vanity, simplicity and arrogance, stability and exacerbation, salvation and perdition, are pairs of opposites that accompany us permanently in our lives. Good and evil, the righteous and the wicked are not divided into two uncrossable worlds. On the contrary, often, the border between both worlds is vague and we usually skirt on the edge of it in many of our decisions and actions."¹⁴⁷ And on the next page these same authors add: "The step from good leadership to bad leadership is just that: a drift, often subtle and imperceptible that ends up transforming us. And the transformation of leaders is not derived mainly from their failures, but from the bad digestion of their successes."

¹⁴⁵ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the Roman Curia* (Dec. 22, 2014).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. The books quoted from BERNARDO STAMATEAS, *Gente tóxica y Más gente tóxica*. FRANCESCO ALBERONI in «*El arte de liderar*», a work already cited, devotes the third part to the demonic face of power.

¹⁴⁷ ÁNGEL CASTEÑEIRA-JOSEP M LOZANO, *El poliedro del Liderazgo*, Libros de Cabecera, Barcelona, 2012, p. 190. These authors quote David Owen talking about the *hybris*, which the Greeks called the sin of pride, excessive flight from reality, arrogance or megalomania, and whose symptoms are: narcissism, concern for a favorable self-image, messianism, sense of omnipotence, self-identification with the organization, confusing the I and we, great self-sufficiency, contempt for advice and criticism, responsibility only before God or History, thoughtlessness, impulsiveness, progressive isolation from reality, inflexible moral conviction and disregard for the practical aspects of the guidelines (see p. 195).

In meetings of superiors it is easy to see that the darkest shadow is "omission." The sin of omission out of respect, in order not to lose respect or out of not daring to face problems, is the most common. When talking about leadership, this topic is not touched. It remains in the dark room of the conscience.

We should not malign too much the conduct of those who govern because, as human beings, they have their weariness, anxieties, dissatisfactions, and irritations. These dark areas can be illuminated, that is, overcome with humble prayer before God, assiduous self-examination, with frequent reconciliation, with the necessary rest and with the help of a companion that serves as a mirror.

11. The Absence of Leaders. The Presence of Their Absence

Community life has undergone great social, cultural, and ecclesial transformations. We move between attention to a double complaint: that of those who believe that community life is very limited in its times and expressions and that of those who believe that the community should be thought of only according to the mission. The trouble is that it often comes to be equated with apostolic activities. They forget that community life is already, in itself, a mission and that the apostolic fruitfulness depends on the quality of fraternal life.¹⁴⁸

There has been a great effort made by the Pontifical Magisterium and by the general chapters of the institutes to clarify the meaning and scope of fraternal life in community. The configuration of the communities and the social and apostolic demands, oblige us to organize the life and mission of the fraternities in a very flexible way. As is already being done in the community projects.

It is obvious that leaders may not be physically present in the house of the community for multiple reasons, but they cannot be absent from the community group habitually. Their absence can be justified according to many and very diverse reasons. It is almost impossible to list them. We can only ask that the community, even in their absence, feel the presence of the mediations that protect it. It is proven that, in absences, the community does not lose the strength of the presence of those who govern it if their moral authority is profound, if their word is true and their example is admirable.

Today we have many means of communication that they did not have years ago. We have mobile phones and the Internet to communicate instantly. On the other hand, in religious communities there is always a vicar, another advisor, or recourse to carry out what was agreed between everyone. In the absence of the superiors, the quality of the art of delegating is verified, as we will see later.

The casuistry of the unjustified absences could also fill pages. There are those who flee due to uncontrolled fears, phobias, or because they are not being recognized or supported. Many people find it difficult to have a personal relationship, to listen to others and, without leaving home, they find excuses not to encounter or deal with the appropriate request of those who need them.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Plenary of the CICLSAL*, November 20, 1992.

Others do not support gatherings and distance them as much as possible or abbreviate them. Excuses about absences tend to be very varied.

But people can be present physically and absent in their attention, in their thoughts and in their hearts. The superiors who watch over their communities must do everything possible not to let their guard down and not to give the feeling that they are "absent" or that they have their hearts elsewhere. It is not uncommon that they stop connecting with the needs of the communities or with the demands of their mission and enter into a state of confusion in which events do not fit and the reactions of people are inexplicable. Also, the syndrome of *burnout* dwells in the superiors. They are burned out by their perfectionist demands, their haste, their addictions to work and the need to be valued. Therefore, they are obliged to overcome it by facing the situation and trying to restore their personal conviction and responsibility to the mission they have received. "*And tell Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you received in the Lord'*" (Col 4:17).

5. SHARED LEADERSHIP

Leadership is not an activity, but rather a life that is shared. No one is a good leader alone. Leaders unite and do not exclude. They depend on their relational quality. They share because only then can they innovate and be able to stimulate, guide, and break into new paradigms. A congregation is a living community in which all its vital and organizational elements revolve around a charism, which is grace, communion, and mission. Governance in the community, as in any other organization, does not work well with commands from a *distance*. It requires the immediate or mediated presence of those who remind us of the project that has been taken on. This remembering excites, inflames, spreads, and involves the life and mission of the community. The shared vision and mission are authentic when they are steeped in *charismatic spirit and complete trust* in people, especially in the closest collaborators. Trust unites and strengthens the group, the governing team. Those who direct, with their presence, with their word, have to instill trust. The key to effective mid-level leaders is trust.¹⁴⁹

1. Jesus Trusts and Delegates. The Founders Do as Well

The praxis of participatory governance has been a reality in different cultures and peoples. In the history of Israel, we can remember the advice that Moses' father-in-law gave him to select those who would help him in the government of the people (Ex 18:15ff, Dt 1:9ff). But here we set our eyes on Jesus, who marks a singular milestone in his relationship with the apostles and with his Church. He prayed before choosing them (cf. Lk 6:12-16). The founders, inspired by the Gospel, shared his way of understanding and proceeding in the governance of their Institutes.

Jesus was a leader and formed a team with those who would be leaders and would form, in turn, other leaders: followers of Jesus in service to the Kingdom. Jesus involved those he called and chose as apostles in his mission. "He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two

¹⁴⁹ Even knowing that there are huge differences between the inspiration and purpose of the groups, we can take advantage of many considerations that come from the world of sports. Cf. EDURNE PASABÁN-ANGÉLICA DEL CARPIO, *Objetivo: confianza. La vía para reconocer y superar nuestros auténticos retos*, Conecta, Barcelona, 2012. PATRICIA RAMÍREZ with Mr. ÓSCAR GARCÍA, *Así lideras, así compites. Todo lo que necesitas para saber sacar lo mejor de tu gente*, Conecta, Barcelona, 2015, 2ª ed.

by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits” (Mk 6:7). He set an example and recommended doing the same. He did not make great speeches about authority, about dialogue, about leadership or about how to organize. He simply lived in the presence of the Father, fulfilling his will and surprising others in the exercise of authority. We already commented on how Jesus is present in the midst of his disciples as the one who serves (cf. Lk 22:31-34) and through his service creates a network of servants of the Kingdom. He built on rock (Mt 13:20). The apostles were the foundation (Eph 2:20). The Spirit will be in charge of granting his gifts, other living stones (1 Pe 2:5), for the edification of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12).

In the group of the apostles there was everything. Some showed their pretensions, others abandoned him and another betrayed him. Despite their frailties, they were chosen and, except for Judas, they all remained in the service. It has to make us think about Jesus’ strong trust. We, as soon as a weakness arises, believe that everything is sinking.

Chapters 13-17 of John are the memorial of what was his mission, the announcement of his glorification and the promise that he would not leave the apostles alone. They would receive the Holy Spirit, who would help them to understand, to live in unity, and to carry out their mission. Jesus washed their feet and gave them the new commandment. He was the vine and his disciples were the branches. He wanted their joy to be complete. He prayed for them. After receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles will remember an emotionally intense farewell for Jesus, full of expressions of support. The tenderness and intimacy that Jesus showed in his farewell was full of trust. You will not be alone then, even if I leave and go to the Father, the Spirit of truth will guide you to the fullness of truth. The Holy Spirit “*will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming*” (Jn 16:13). He had told them before: “The Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning” (Jn 15:26-27).

Jesus’ authority was complete on the cross and tested in the resurrection. Jesus did not have a leadership school, but rather his life and mission was leadership in which he participated as a gift of service even to the end. Now we can focus our attention on the extent of what Jesus delegated. We will see the balance between authority and trust.

The Church, under the impulse of the Spirit, was unfolding under the dynamics of *trust* and *delegation* for the service of the Gospel. The book of *Acts of the Apostles* offers data on the governance of the nascent and thriving Church. The apostles, with their authority, laid hands on others for the ministry, founded, and organized the communities. Saint Paul exercised his apostolic authority and consecrated Titus and Timothy. The priests and deacons helped the bishops. Women had a special place in the growth of Christian communities.

What must be emphasized is that the prolongation of the mission of Christ was carried out through mediations of service. The ministry was not accessed on their own initiative, or as a reward or distinction, but through the gratuitousness of the Spirit. The pretension of Simon who wanted to buy this gift was despicable (cf. Acts 8:18-23). Prayer, discernment and the laying on of hands accompanied the delegation of authority that was enveloped in trust.

In the history of religious life, from the origins of monasticism, the praxis of the chapter and the council appears. The founders always refer to the divine origin of their work and rely on the brothers and sisters that the Spirit gives them. By reading the history of the foundations, we discover how the inspiration and the evangelical project have been extended to serve the Church and humanity.¹⁵⁰ Sometimes, the founders seek those who want to share life and mission. Other times, they become magnets that attract by their reputation for holiness, by their evangelical spirit, by their prophetic vigor, by their identification with the poor, by their dedication to the excluded, by their apostolic charity and by their passion for the Kingdom, by their gift of counsel, etc. These dispositions stand out in them: sharing the vision and mission of the nascent institute and serving everyone in everything. Among these services, obviously, are the transmission of the charism and the organization of the fraternities.

In the Church as well as in the religious institutes, it is crucial to "rely on others" to carry out the mission. The apostolic college and the episcopal councils, like the councils of the superiors and the animation and advisory groups that depend on them, move according to a radical trust in people and the effective delegation of functions. In any case, there is a substantial difference between the meaning of *trust* and *delegation* for Jesus and the founders. The apostolic community, the Church, is founded on the person of Jesus. The religious institutes, inspired by the Church through the Holy Spirit, are organized around the following of Jesus and the prolongation of his mission, but not around the person of the founders. In fact, there are institutes that continue to exist even though the founders abandoned them or were expelled from them.

Trust, delegation, and subsidiarity are coordinated. Even today it is difficult for us to delegate, especially to the laity. The shared mission with them continues to be a challenge. But shared mission is not something optional, but a requirement of our ecclesial condition. It proposes living the charism and carrying out the mission together. The potential of the communion of vocations, especially with the laity, for the mission is immense! (cf. VC 54). Trust widens our capacity to collaborate and is an ointment that softens tense and conflictive relationships. The topic is being studied in all forms of consecrated life. The resources are numerous and we should take advantage of them.

2. Subsidiarity at the Local Level

I return to subsidiarity. This dynamic is the foundation of shared governance. It reflects the structural condition of created beings, of human beings, of the Church and of consecrated life. Subsidiarity is inherent in us because we move from interdependence and the exchange of values and complementarity. God wanted to save mankind in intimate connection (cf. LG 9). "No member of the People of God, no matter what ministry he may exercise, possesses personally in himself, in their totality, gifts, offices and duties, but must enter into communion with the others. Differences in the People of God, whether of gifts or functions, converge and mutually complement one another, for the unique communion and mission" (MR 9 b).

Sharing the governance according to the principles of communion and mission does not suppress the diversity of functions. Subsidiarity seeks to promote the full development of people

¹⁵⁰ JESÚS ÁLVAREZ GÓMEZ. *Historia de la vida religiosa*, 3 vols. Madrid: PCI, 1996 2ª ed.

and authorities within their own spheres. The community must offer all members the help they need to live their personal vocation and to exercise their mission. Subsidiarity supposes a recognition of the people who contribute their best help to the community; recognizing their freedom through which they choose the project of life offered in the Constitutions and of all the values with which they enrich the community.

It also implies *the hierarchical organization* of powers (general, provincial and local), *decentralization* of responsibilities and *autonomy of functions* whereby, at various levels, superiors will be provided with the appropriate faculties so as to avoid useless or too frequent recourse to higher authority.

The exercise of authority encourages them to assume responsibilities and respects them once they have been assumed. In the face of difficulties, they transmit Christian strength to the collaborators. They patiently coordinate everyone.¹⁵¹ The governance driven by solidarity supports the decentralization of services, while effectively coordinating functions at all levels. It guarantees there is always transparent communication and effective communion.¹⁵²

3. Leaders, the Councils, and Other Intermediate Teams

The leaders of our communities are not alone in the face of big decisions. They have groups of people who help them in a permanent and stable way to exercise a wise and prudent governance.¹⁵³ They often have other teams or commissions that help in promotion, formation, and management. All these are what we can call intermediate teams. They can also be extended to the councils with the laity, especially today when many educational, health and social centers, while under the responsibility of the Institute, are managed by them. Sometimes it is difficult to understand that the charism of the Institute belongs to the Church and that we are the Church and we build the Church in a reciprocity of charisms and ministries. The formation of the laity to collaborate according to the charismatic inspiration of our services and works remains a challenge.

Leaders work as a team and serve as a team. They make the fraternity in governance clear by going out to encounter others, establishing relationships, building bridges, rebuilding broken relationships, promoting connections, and keeping dialogue active. They keep watch so that

¹⁵¹ Cf. *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 25, a. And in this same paragraph it adds: “Persons in authority need to ‘be present’ when necessary, to foster in the members of the community the sense of interdependence, as far from childish dependence as from a self-sufficient independence. This interdependence is the fruit of that interior freedom that permits each one to work and collaborate, to substitute, as well as to be substituted for, to take an active part and to make his or her own contribution, even from behind the scenes. Whoever exercises the service of authority will have to be attentive not to give into the temptation of personal self-sufficiency, to believe that everything depends on him or her and that it would not be important and useful to foster community participation; it is better to take one step together than to take two or more alone.”

¹⁵² The Magisterium of the Church is quite explicit about this topic. Cf. ES, II, 18; MR 13; EE, I, 52; FLC 48, 50; VC 43; SAfC 14; SAO 25, a.

¹⁵³ The existence of councils at the general, provincial, and local levels is not optional, but mandatory. The authority is personal but it is not exercised alone. It is *shared* in governance and in other instances in which the active participation of everyone is assured. “Coresponsibility and participation are also exercised even in various types of councils at various levels, in order to ensure the constant presence of the Lord who enlightens and guides.” *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 14.

communion is maintained as a principle and an end and does not become a means. Teamwork has choral and symphonic qualities. Leaders create a state of synergy among the members of the councils.¹⁵⁴

The charismatic and institutional presence of leaders is made operational through these intermediate teams. There must be perceived in them the inspiration, the dreams, and the vision of those who govern in the name of the Institutes which have certain charisms and missions. Whoever collaborates must contribute their passion and energy so that the community - local, provincial, general - lives with joy their vocation and mission in the Church and in society. They are also forces of cohesion and relaunching.

The more complex the task of governing, the more necessary the collaboration and the more it is necessary to train and qualify the intermediate teams. Even if the ultimate decisions are made by the corresponding superior, the latter, in some cases, must have the advisory or deliberative vote of the council as indicated by the CIC and the proper law (cf. CIC, 627).¹⁵⁵ The Church, which wants to safeguard the rights of the people, gives its precautions so that the actions of the superiors are valid. This norm is rooted in the historical wisdom of religious life, with different names, such as advisors, elders, assistants, definers, partners and consultants, but with the same function of giving their opinion or consent.

The specialists deal with the various types of advice, the procedures, the obligations of the advisors and the cases in which the deliberative vote is required. Here a very influential variant is underlined which is the *interdependence* “ad intra” and “ad extra” of the council. The interdependence between the members of a governance in which there is a diversity of competencies is obvious.¹⁵⁶ Information, feelings, issues, projects, risks, successes and failures are shared, and, above all, prayer and communication of the Word in faith. But the leaders and the advisors do not form a closed group. Therefore, it is important for each one of the people in the governing group to pay attention to the influences that come to them from other people, from communities or from larger organizations. Much information and many comments contribute to edification, but others do not, because they obscure things or create suspicions or aversions. If there is no transparency and cooperation in the discernment of these influences, the good

¹⁵⁴ When there was no talk of leadership, FR. ARCADIO LARRAONA, Secretary of the Congregation of Religious in the 1950s, had this motto: “Hacer, dejar hacer, dar que hacer y hacer hacer” [Do, let do, give what to do and actually do], *Principios y criterios de adaptación y organización*. Actas del Congreso Nacional de Perfección y Apostolado. Madrid: Cocusa, 1958, vol. III, p. 1133.

¹⁵⁵ This canon has been widely commented by canon law experts. D. J. ANDRÉS, *Las formas de vida consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2005, pp. 178-183; VELASIO DE PAOLIS. *La vida consagrada en la Iglesia*. Madrid: BAC, 2011, pp. 237-244; Cf. PRIAMO ETZI. “Il Consiglio Del Superiore religioso. Normativa e dibattiti (cann. 627 e127)”. *Vita Consacrata* 39 (2003) 612-635.

¹⁵⁶ “It is also necessary that the proper law of each institute be as precise as possible in determining the respective competence of the community, the various councils, departmental coordinators and the superior. A lack of clarity in this area is a source of confusion and conflict. ‘Community projects’, which can help increase participation in community life and in its mission in various contexts, should also take care to define clearly the role and competence of authority, in line with the constitutions.” FLC, 51. SAO 20.

relationship that the members of the governing team should have could be ruined.¹⁵⁷ It will be necessary to distinguish information from gossip which generates, at the very least, so much confusion and that, sometimes, divides the members of the team. Communication today flows as an expression of life that must be pampered and protected.

In the chapters and councils, service to unity and communion must be considered through dialogue, participation, subsidiarity, and co-responsibility. In this dynamic one must allow for the role of confidentiality for the protection of persons. Not everything is meant to be communicated. Communication has been called the "fourth power." Hence the need to choose well who is entrusted with communication in the congregational or provincial community. Good communication is a determining factor in creative and innovative processes and for the harmony and serenity of everyone.

In the post-conciliar period, there has been a multiplication of assemblies, work groups, and the establishment of teams for promotion and coordination, and leadership or administrative management. Gatherings have increased considerably and, therefore, movement and travel. But we do not govern through tourism. This is where the value of presence in governance becomes obvious.

It is possible that, in fact, we may have created too many gatherings. It would be necessary to eliminate all those that do not make their *raison d'être* transparent. On the other hand, it is worth asking ourselves: What would it mean to live under the dictates of one person when everyone is necessary to achieve the purpose of the community to which they belong? Consecrated life has a history of communion, of communicating and doing things together. We belong to a world in which people feel the need to share their feelings and knowledge and to strengthen ties in the interest of solidarity. It is not easy to evaluate the good provided by the act of gathering and exchanging looks, gestures, words of alignment and affirmation of our own identity. It is priceless to confess together what we are and look at the future together. It can be affirmed with certainty that betting on participation is betting on *innovation, transformation, and growth*.

The council, the team, is chosen or appointed, but it takes time to come together. The same configuration is already an exercise in balance and life as a team implies a great asceticism. In the Institutes, due to having to attend to the geographical and cultural allocations and the technical preparation of the people, the scattering arises of criteria, sensibilities, tastes, and hobbies. In addition to taking into account the backgrounds and qualities of the people who make up the teams, it is necessary to have work rhythms and the proper distribution of time so that no one is overloaded. Today, teamwork becomes more expensive due to the complexity it entails, but it is an expression of wealth and an invaluable witness of communion. Patience and hope go hand in hand on the journey.

4. Qualifying the Intermediate Teams

¹⁵⁷ I have tried to answer this question: When does the council really help in governance? A. BOCOS MERINO. *Tiempos de comunión y de misión*. Madrid: PCl, 2008, pp. 585-602.

When it comes to qualifying the intermediate teams, it is important to highlight these three facets: *trust, delegation and the cohesiveness of the group*. They acquire their full strength when they are understood and energized by the gift of the Spirit of Christ and the charism of the founders. If the leaders and the members of the councils or teams distance themselves from this spiritual current, what is trust reduced to and what value does the delegation of functions have?

Let us assume that trust and delegation will be different according to the various circles and levels in governance. There are issues that can or should be treated with transparency and certainty with some and not with others. Let us remember that governance in consecrated life, as in the Church, is orderly and allows for levels of responsibility. Hence, also, delegation allows for differences. The levels to which we now refer are the General or Provincial Teams and their respective councils or commissions.

All members are gifts, have positions on the team and help carry out the objective of governance. Their qualities, their experiences, and their ways of relating enrich the whole. It is good to appreciate the divergence because it offers alternative solutions and fosters the responsibility for new initiatives. If differences are noticed, may it be in secondary issues, because the body must enjoy good health and inner harmony. St. Paul warns about this in 1 Cor 12:14ff.

It is imperative that whoever governs *trust themselves* and that they possess that emotional state that gives them certainty about what they think and do. May they joyfully live out their vocation and mission. And, equally, it is necessary that they *trust the members* of their teams. Confidence is needed in one's self and in others. Trust generates motivation, inspiration and raises up new projects and commitments. Let us think, for a moment, about what happens when there is no trust and we will see that fear, silence, reluctance, disengagement, and inhibition in responsibility appear. Mistrust leads us to close ourselves off to others. Where there is no trust, suspicions, reservations and hidden conflicts dwell. Only what is convenient is then communicated.

Something similar can be said about the delegation of functions.¹⁵⁸ Bad leaders are demanding. Good leaders propose realistic goals to their collaborators. For that reason, to delegate is also to go out of oneself, to renounce being the center, to encourage participation and to incentivize the achievement of objectives. No one among their brothers and sisters, in whatever circle (general, provincial or local), has all the qualities, or is qualified to perform all functions. The more people are prepared to participate in the vision and mission of leaders, the greater the possibility of achieving the planned goals. Those who delegate break up the monotony and boredom, increase dynamism and encourage growth. Giving opportunities to the other members of the community is enriching for them. Those who receive the delegation feel recognized. They are more present at the time of supporting the changes and the progress of the community.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ "To delegate means to act methodically, with trust, patience, and courage to create dynamism: delegate + initiative + take risks + right to errors." FRANÇOIS AÉLION. *El arte de dirigir. De Baltasar Gracián a Peter Drucker*. Barcelona: Gestio 2000, 2002, p. 150.

¹⁵⁹ In this line we have clear guidelines in FLC 50; VC 92, SAfC, 14.

Leaders delegate when there is vision and trust. There are leaders who find it difficult to delegate and marginalize or ignore their advisors. They practice the strategy of the Hedgehog Concept. The consequences are bad for them and their communities. They have not learned the art of delegating and they lack generosity to do so.

The presence of leaders in the councils and in the commissions or intermediate groups is an active presence, which repositions their brothers and sisters in the evangelical and charismatic *humus* that is their own. And in this humus is where people have the opportunity to express themselves and where reciprocity arises as an exponent of the quality of service, both of the superiors and of the councils and teams. The presence of leaders creates an environment that is conducive to learning, helps finalize the project and for it be investigated with patience and perseverance. They foster the acceptance of challenges and encourage people to respond. They take care that everyone grows professionally with specific formation.

The *cohesion* of the team is the third word we mentioned when thinking about the qualification of the intermediate teams. Both the chairs and those who make up the councils or the different teams must have a vision, a project, a strategy that makes them come together. In part, this vision is offered by the General or Provincial Chapter and leaders contribute their creative and revitalizing presence. Everyone contributes to circulating intuitions, suggestions, and mutual support through information, communication, and co-responsibility. They need, then, to be *motivated* and *committed* to carry out what they have seen to be the best for the communities. This is the dynamic of authentic reciprocity. The asceticism and mysticism that this reciprocity entails are of high demand because they mean being aware of others, their contributions and their functions; respect for competence, constant help in times of need and continuous reconciliation in times of disagreement and rivalries.

The human sciences have made great progress in understanding the value of leadership and intermediate teams. The rainbow has been used as a beautiful and balanced model for leading: "Thus, red is identified with 'commanding'; orange, with 'managing'; yellow, with 'uniting'; green, with 'accepting'; blue, with 'guiding'; and indigo with 'training.' We are left with violet, a very important activity, which corresponds to 'representing' the team as a leader."¹⁶⁰ It is fitting, from the beginning, that the members of the team express their feelings of belonging and commitment to the mission they have taken on by conjugating the verbs into first person plural: "We."

It is true that the mission marks the lives of the superiors and of the councils and teams, because without clarity about the mission, we do not know where to direct the activities we entrust. But it is also important to have these when entering into life's journey of relationships between the superiors and the people who collaborate: mutual acceptance, spontaneous discernment, generous sharing, responsible involvement, unwavering support, firm commitment, cordial confidentiality,

¹⁶⁰ JOSÉ ANTONIO SÁINZ-JUAN CARLOS CUBEIRO. *El club del liderazgo*. Barcelona: Empresa Activa, 2006, p. 46; JORGE CUERVO. *Leaders Don't Command*, Viva Books Private Limited, 2017.; LUCIO R. LESCANO DUNCAN. *Líderes de servicio. Cómo desarrollar un liderazgo trascendente en el nivel intermedio de la organización*. Madrid: Ed. Internacionales Universitarias, 2012; J. OSWALD SANDERS. *Liderazgo espiritual*. Michigan: Portavoz, 1995.

complete identification, careful complementarity and the necessary review or evaluation. These are steps on the journey and, for that matter, the qualification of the groups. When this path is followed, the councils and the teams cease to be mere decorative vases surrounding the superiors and are instead organizations that help people in their personal and evangelizing life.

6. GOVERNING A COMMUNITY IN THIS DIGITAL AGE

In Part One I promised to address this topic. There is very little talk about religious governance in this digital age.¹⁶¹ Not so many years ago, it was common to speak of a fluid world and fluidity, but today the challenge comes from the Internet. The issue has become much more complex. I share my concern and I invite others, with more expertise, to tackle it and offer guiding lights and indicators for those who are called to promote the life in fraternity inaugurated by Jesus. Also, in the digital age the religious community is called to be a Bethany where hospitality, listening, contemplation, friendship, life, and mission become a reality. How much can the wires of the network contribute to reliving this proximity experienced in Bethany?

1. Community is Extended

The Internet, as we have seen, is inherent in our daily lives. It is not only a means, but also an environment in which we move. The immediate connection is something that we have as a starting point. It is already unthinkable not to be able to connect in all places and at all times. What happens to us when there is no connection or when people do not answer their cell phone or there are no messages? We need only recall the situations lived out in our communities. The explanation has a profound reason: “Connectivity is both a technical and a moral imperative. It is about always being included, available and accessible. We do not handle disconnection well because we are psychologically configured with the feeling that we are missing something, without arguments to stop the multiplication of contacts and hurried by the demand for continuous performance. Not being available to others or resisting certain networks is a rarity. Connection has been the key to personal opportunities and the source of wealth for nations. Digital inequality has been posed as a problem of access inequality and not so much in the effective capacity to do something with such technologies.”¹⁶² On the other hand, we have to look at this world of networks with admiration and gratitude. Digitalization points to something out there, to another beauty, to another happiness. We must value it as a means that promotes respect, dialogue, and friendship and seeks to unite and strengthen relationships. This networked world has open doors that lead to God.

For a large part of men and women religious the means or instruments of communication have become instruments of educational, formative, and pastoral work. And this is leading to new styles of community life, which are more flexible in composition, in dedication, in rhythms of life and located more on the peripheries.

¹⁶¹ You can see some guiding lights in ANTONIO SPADARO. *Ciberteología*. Pensar el cristianismo en tiempos de la red. Barcelona: Herder, 2014, pp. 97-98. [For English version see ANTONIO SPADARO. *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*, Maria Way (Translator) Fordham University Press, (2014).]

¹⁶² DANIEL INNERARITY. “La libertad como desconexión”. *El País*, Ideas, 24-III-2015, p. 8.

Governance, faced with the new situation created by technology, encounters many *opportunities*. They are obvious when it comes to examining the great contributions of digital technology, which is so valuable for communication and creating ties, for ongoing formation, for ministry, for teamwork, for vocation ministry, to support solidarity and for so many other forms of help in the service of the Kingdom. It is also true that there are many *challenges*, such as those that arise in the personal sphere (identity and belonging of the user), in healthy and healing interpersonal relationships, in the way of understanding and living community and in the use of time and availability.

Moving between a fluid life and the digital revolution produces some imbalances. The fascination with novelty that the Internet offers has created a high number of Internet addicts. It is a new disease in our time. Uncontrolled connection fosters ambiguity, anxiety in searching for emotions, narcissism, and eagerness to have the greatest number of passing relationships. Psychosociology is addressing the many disorders caused by abuse in the use of the Internet.¹⁶³ It is not surprising that formators pay a lot of attention to helping young people be able to move in this complex world of communication with freedom and responsibility.¹⁶⁴ Those responsible for formation and governance feel the urgency to open paths of searching, critical analysis, and discernment in communication to new generations (“digital natives”)¹⁶⁵ who enter consecrated life. To be able to navigate in this immense digital ocean it is necessary to know how to use a compass. Governance by people for people and the generations that make up consecrated life today are very marked by the moment in which they were formed. We are all immersed in the great changing of the times. But the only ones saved from the vertigo that change brings are those who love life, know where they are going, discern, and act with intellectual and affective maturity. It is probable that those of us who are pre-digital are not able to combine quickly the two realities of the real and the virtual, but we can at least understand and give support so that young people can achieve it. It is necessary to encourage them to be consistent in the processes of transformation that the same Spirit has put us all in. We are not mere spectators of the changes. This is our time to remember and bet on other values that emerge from the new culture. “The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (EG 169).

¹⁶³ CATERINA CANGIÁ. “La casa interconectada y sus tres pantallas: posibilidades y adiciones”. In: *Aa.Vv. La casa de todos. Comunidad: misión y morada*. XXXIX Semana Nacional de Vida Consagrada. Madrid: PCI, 2010, pp. 213-229.

¹⁶⁴ FERNANDO PRADO AYUSO. *La era digital, una oportunidad para la vida consagrada*. Madrid: PCI, 2010, p. 28.

¹⁶⁵ DR. TONINO CANTELMÍ calls all those who were born in the third millennium and have been subjected to deep, precocious and invading digital technological immersions, “digital natives.” He adds that “the current observations allow us to appreciate authentic mutations in the brain-mind system.” Cf. “Mundos telemáticos, comunicación digital y vida consagrada”. In: *Conectados. Vida consagrada y cultura digital*. Madrid: PCI, 2011, pp. 131-132. He has broadened his thinking about what he has expressed in this collaboration in: “Vita consacrata in una società liquida. Quale costruzione dell’identità umana e spirituale”. In: *La vita consacrata e il nuovo ambiente digitale. Sfidi e opportunità formative*. Bologna: EDB, 2015, pp. 117-137. In this same work is found the collaboration of PINA RICCIERI. “La comunicazione digitale: un nuovo ambiente per la formazione alla vita consacrata”, pp. 21-52; Id. *Formación al alcance de un clic*. Madrid: Paulinas, 2013.

Also, in this field leaders are asked, as a first requirement, for the “vision”, that is, that design of communities with clear and positive futures that can be accepted by their brothers and sisters in order to be involved in it. This “vision” is not only an objective that reaches the rational mind, but affects people’s emotions. “The objective is pursued; the vision is lived. A true vision must be able to lead us to look inside ourselves, to find and mobilize our own proposals of excellence.”¹⁶⁶ We need vision to transmit our dreams of communities in which all are neighbors and become brothers and sisters. But leaders are also asked to be passionate about the *mission*. They are not mere exhibitors and spectators. Their leadership is out of love and they have to get involved and involve others. How can they contemplate the world of the poor, of the persecuted and of those who suffer and then sit back and do nothing? These are key questions: Who is and where is my neighbor? What community do we want?

New technologies favor getting in touch with people from other continents and other cultures. Relationships are extended and a “community” of possible friendships is formed. A broad vision emerges of a world without borders and without the barrier of distance. Horizons are always open and “utopia” grows. The heart widens and convictions are reaffirmed. The values of universality, communion, solidarity, interactivity, and exchange are positive for a *mission community*. There is only one condition: do not forget the center of reality, that is, the weight of pain and marginalization, the commitment to whoever asks us for immediate help and, of course, the physical fellowship with those with whom we are united in the same life project and who live with us.

Let us not look away from the “face” of the poor and of the brother or sister of the community. They may be asking us to give them a hand.¹⁶⁷

2. But Who is my Neighbor?

It is striking that Pope Benedict XVI¹⁶⁸ and Pope Francis have coincided in two messages for World Social Communications Days (2011 and 2014) in asking the same question: Who is my neighbor? “This question,” says Pope Francis, “can help us to see communication in terms of ‘neighborliness.’ We might paraphrase the question in this way: How can we be ‘neighborly’ in our use of the communications media and in the new environment created by digital technology?”¹⁶⁹

I offer this consideration to those who are involved in Internet technology: “The concept of ‘neighbor’ does not depend on a wire, but is traditionally linked to proximity, that is, to the spatial vicinity. The fracture of proximity is due to the fact that closeness is established through technology through what is ‘close’ to me, that is, ‘neighbor,’ the one that is ‘connected’ to me. I

¹⁶⁶ JORGE CUERVO, *oc*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁶⁷ Pope Francis repeats frequently: “We need to build up this culture of encounter. We do not love concepts or ideas; no one loves a concept or an idea. We love people... Commitment, true commitment, is born of the love of men and women, of children and the elderly, of peoples and communities... of names and faces which fill our hearts.” *Address in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia*, July 9, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ BENEDICTO XVI in his encyclical “*Deus caritas est*,” in nos. 15-18 makes a beautiful reflection about the love of neighbor.

¹⁶⁹ POPE FRANCIS, *Message for XLVIII World Communications Day* (2014).

run the risk of feeling ‘distant’ from a friend of mine who lives nearby but who is not on Facebook and who uses little *e-mail*, and to feel, on the contrary, ‘close’ to a person that I have never met, who has become a ‘friend’ because she is friends with a friend of mine, and with whom I maintain a frequent exchange on the web. (...) Today it is normal not to recognize the faces that come our way on the street, and it is evident that the neighbor is substantially unknown. The problematic point is that we begin to value proximity with criteria that are too elementary, deprived of the complexity of a true and deep relationship.”¹⁷⁰

In Pope Francis’ writings there are many references to the Gospel message of love of neighbor explained in personalist terms. For him proximity, contact and the face of the other play a decisive role. Here are two texts that confirm it and that illuminate how to place ourselves adequately before our neighbor: “The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction” (EG 88). And later he adds: “it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas, and learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity. There indeed we find true healing, since the way to relate to others which truly heals instead of debilitating us, is a *mystical* fraternity, a contemplative fraternity. It is a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others just as their heavenly Father does. Here and now, especially where we are a ‘little flock’ (Lk 12:32), the Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community!”¹⁷¹

In current religious life we must bring to the minds and hearts of each man and woman religious and of the religious communities the ultimate questions about their situation, about their services and about their occupations. Are we where we should not be? Are we where we should be? This also applies to positions in the digital cloud.

3. The Urgency of Sitting Down in Order to Discern

Searching and discerning are two actions that look to the future. They are actions that are inscribed in personal and communal fidelity. While we search and discern, within us there is a conversion to the other, to others. Decisions become self-evident. We cannot continue claiming that we are more connected but less connected relationally.

¹⁷⁰ ANTONIO SPADARO, *oc*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁷¹ POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, 91 and 92. In his message on the occasion of the XXIII World Day of the Sick, he talked about “*Sapientia cordis*” and explains that the *wisdom of the heart* means serving our brothers and sisters, being with our brothers and sisters, going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters and showing solidarity with our brothers and sisters (Dec. 30, 2014).

The goal of this urgency of sitting down in order to discern is to strengthen personal relationships. Will we not have to do away with our *uncertain identities*?¹⁷² It is urgent to foster trust and communication. Since governance is a transversal axis in our lives, there are points that need reconsideration from the perspective of searching together and of communal discernment in order to take on and commit ourselves to change and to help our spiritual growth. Now that, in the social context, non-places are predominant, the religious community becomes an icon of welcome, the integration of differences and a witness of proximity.

In this point that concerns us, leaders, relying on our brothers and sisters, have a special task: to try to harmonize the realities of the real and the virtual. Perhaps it is the most radical challenge and the one with the greatest transcendence. We have to maintain a long-term view of the processes in which we find ourselves involved, but without losing sight of the immediate, what is happening on a daily basis in our communities. It continues to be necessary to reaffirm the open and dynamic *identity* of the charismatic community, the *belonging* that originates from choosing this life project and the evangelizing *mission*. How much does communication technology contribute to this? What effects are we seeing in its use and abuse? What risks are we taking with regard to security, privacy, and manipulation?¹⁷³ In short, does it help us to be more human? Does the Internet bring us closer to those who are suffering, lonely and hoping for our help?

We already know that we cannot stem the tide and we have to give thanks for the many new signs of communion and creativity that have appeared. But we cannot close our eyes to the facts that worry communities. Here are some examples: dispersion and lack of critical reflection, dependence, and addition, the manipulation of the information, superficiality in judgments of value and the consequent disorientation. Many speak of "chat syndrome" which is typical of people who spend their time in front of the computer disconnecting with the reality of the world of those who suffer and need a saving presence. Ultimately there are two problems, which are not small ones: the irresponsibility in the use of time and the lack of attention to the people who, when they become isolated, take refuge in the computer. On the other hand, it is wrong to get so uncontrollably mixed up because of a love of what is new, but it is worse to run away from those who need our presence and assistance while giving inconsistent excuses.

What can we do to avoid loneliness? Because whoever is not connected is condemned to loneliness. It is a general phenomenon. You only need to go out on the street and you will see young friends or couples who are walking beside each other while communicating with other people through their cell phone or iPad. You look at the park benches with couples sitting without saying a word to each other and talking on the phone or exchanging text messages. A religious recently commented: "We had a gathering of five colleagues and we had each come from different places. As soon as we had dinner, the other four turned on their phones and I ended up saying: 'I'm leaving because I'm tired of so much loneliness.'" Before, religious communities had the habit of gathering to converse, exchange thoughts or watch television programs together that would arouse some discussion, but now everyone immediately retires to their room and turns on

¹⁷² Cf. HELENA BÉJAR. *Identidades inciertas: Zygmunt Bauman*. Barcelona: Herder, 2009, pp. 127 y ss.

¹⁷³ With regard to what is public and private, cf. MARIO VARGAS LLOSA. *La civilización del espectáculo*. Madrid: Prisa Ediciones, 2012, pp. 155-156; BYUN-CHUL HAN. *En enjambre*. Barcelona: Herder, 2015.

their computers in order to converse. We give time to others, but not to our own: those of our house, above all, the elderly and the sick. It is not enough to care well for the elderly and the sick materially, but we need to be close to them.

This is not a question that community leaders can solve, but they can promote exercises of closeness towards their brothers and sisters who need to share their feelings; and try to value gatherings, eating together, enjoying beauty and open dialogue. Leaders of the communities, docile to the Spirit, must involve all their brothers and sisters in the evangelizing mission, whose first expression is the testimony of fraternal love. Where is the *mutual, intense, and cordial* love of which Peter and Paul speak?¹⁷⁴ Even in the digital era we must continue singing the hymn of love: “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7). The Pauline invitations continue to resonate with special relevance: to encourage one another (cf. 1 Thes 5:11); to build one another up (cf. Rom 14:19); to serve one another through love (cf. Gal 5:13); to bear with one another through love (cf. Eph 4:2; 5:21; Col 3:13); to admonish one another (cf. Rom 15:14); to be kind to one another (cf. Eph 4:32); to be compassionate, forgiving one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13) and to console one another (cf. 1 Thes 4:8; 5:11). They are signs of effective proximity.

The other vital point on which to sit down and discern is the evangelizing mission that shapes the community. The digital world is calling for “pastoral conversion”¹⁷⁵ of the users. It is not only a matter of how to use the new media, symbols and language, but how we are going to face the two major relationships on which the human being depends: *filiation* and *fraternity*. For more than a century people have lamented being orphaned by the death of God and the absolutization of autonomy and the death of the neighbor. Through the Internet man can have an encounter with God and neighbor. Through it we enter into new vital spaces. But from what disposition do we begin the journey (the new pilgrimage), accompany, transmit gratitude, spread hope, and promote solidarity? How do we go forth to encounter those who need liberation, healing, and salvation? How do we promote *proximity* and the exchange of gifts in order to grow as human beings, as followers of Jesus? There will be no lack of those who continue to ask themselves about the way of understanding humanity, the Church, the liturgy, the Eucharist, and convergent intelligence.¹⁷⁶

The answers to these and similar questions, discerned in community, help to organize spaces and the use of time in a different way than usual.

4. Connecting and Disconnecting

¹⁷⁴ “Love one another intensely from a [pure] heart” (1 Pt 1:22). “Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10).

¹⁷⁵ Aparecida, the Synod of the New Evangelization and Pope Francis in EG 25 and 27 all spoke about “pastoral conversion.”

¹⁷⁶ Cf. ANTONIO SPADARO, *o. c.*; BRUNO SECONDIN. “‘Ecco, ho aperto davanti a te una porta...’ (Ap 3,8). Esperienza spirituale nell’era digitale: riflessioni teologiche, ecclesiologiche, antropologiche”. In: Aa. Vv. *La vita consacrata e il nuovo ambiente digitale*. Bologna: EDB, 2015, pp. 167-205.

This is the issue: discerning and deciding; exercising wisdom and freedom. Knowing what we are for, what we want and what is right for our life and mission. In connections there are always reasons and purposes. In our habitual behavior it is easy to take them for granted. From an apostolic heart, with a clear and defined identity, everything points towards the proclamation, towards giving the best of what we carry within ourselves. Those who look only at themselves, seek their own gratification, sometimes at the cost of a change of identity and renouncing fraternal ties. It is better to stop and realize what we expect and the paths we travel. There are paths that distance us from our interior lives and distance us from our brothers and sisters.

Everything is easier to connect. It can begin with a need with many variants (physical, intellectual, formative, spiritual, pastoral, informational, work-related, and recreational needs, etc). To disconnect requires boldness and courage. Today voices are heard in favor of disconnection, the need not to feel burdened, to recover distance and live more from the values of personal interiority. There is a lot of exhaustion from so much information and the power of it all is overwhelming. “In less than twenty years we have gone from the pleasure of connection to a latent desire for disconnection (Francis Jaureguierry). (...) The acceptance of a right to disconnect has been emerging as the inconveniences and pathologies of hyper-connectivity have been more visible. There is an increase in the diagnoses that speak of a true dependency caused by the excess of questions and the communicative overdose.”¹⁷⁷

Two reflections. Pope Benedict XVI, in his *Message for World Communications Day* (2012), invited people to combine silence and the word. “It concerns,” he said, “two aspects of communication which need to be kept in balance, to alternate and to be integrated with one another if authentic dialogue and deep closeness between people are to be achieved. When word and silence become mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, either because it gives rise to confusion or because, on the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of coldness; when they complement one another, however, communication acquires value and meaning.”

Two years later, Pope Francis said: “We need, for example, to recover a certain sense of deliberateness and calm. This calls for time and the ability to be silent and to listen. We need also to be patient if we want to understand those who are different from us. People only express themselves fully when they are not merely tolerated, but know that they are truly accepted. If we are genuinely attentive in listening to others, we will learn to look at the world with different eyes and come to appreciate the richness of human experience as manifested in different cultures and traditions. We will also learn to appreciate more fully the important values inspired by Christianity, such as the vision of the human person, the nature of marriage and the family, the proper distinction between the religious and political spheres, the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and many others” (*Message for World Communications Day*, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ DANIEL INNERARITY. *La libertad como desconexión*. El País, Ideas, 24V-2015, p. 4. Cf. JONATHAN CRARY. *La vida sin pausa*. El País, Ideas, 24-V-2015, p. 2. In the same issue of the newspaper, p. 9, Ana Carbajosa points out: “The experts, like Maryanne Wolf, recommend reserving a time every day to disconnect from the screens and the internet in order to recover the calm and concentration necessary for deep reading. Wolf explains that it is not enough to sit down and pick up a book. She advises leaving the cell phone and the tablet outside the room so as not to succumb to temptation. ‘We have to make a conscious effort, because we are bombarded with more and more information.’”

This phenomenon of hyper-connectivity, seen from the perspective of religious life, is asking us to rethink the values that sustain our life project and pay attention to them. Interior silence, seeking the face of the Lord and of our brothers and sisters, peaceful prayer and peaceful serenity of daily life, lead us to have a different rhythm to our tasks and a different balance between relationships and privacy. One can only dare to disconnect for a greater good. Ours is to fly in freedom, “It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord...it will be impeded from flying...”¹⁷⁸

Is there a future for the religious community in this digital age? There is and it is full of vitality, but this vitality requires integration of presences, times and cordial relations, which is where proximity is verified and quality is given to the mission. The processes of transformation are carried out by free and responsible people, that is, those who, overcoming all types of slavery, are transparent, available and dare to go to the peripheries and to difficult places to evangelize.

I conclude with this Seneca saying: “We do not dare many things because they are difficult, but they are difficult because we do not dare to do them.”

7. LEADERSHIP HAS AN END, BUT THERE IS AN AFTER

People who lead have a limited time. We reflect a lot on leadership and what it means to be creative and transformative in our community, be it local, provincial or general, but the aftermath, the situation of those leaving governance is not usually talked about very much. It is good to put the emphasis on how to exercise leadership, but we must not forget about the people who lead. In the system of governance of the Institutes, in which the positions are temporary, the leadership is relieved. The people who served in these roles are still there. It is healthy for the mind and heart of those who govern to be aware that their service is temporary.

At the end of my service to the Claretian Congregation, the Council of the USG asked me to give some points of reflection for those who were beginning their service in their institutes. I offered suggestions to the Assembly, not only for those who were starting, but also for those who are in the three or four phases of governance. I transcribe the ten suggestions for those who are finishing.

“There are many tongue-in-cheek comments about the end of the time of governance. I once heard a variant to the usual saying: “del árbol caído todos hacen leña” [From a fallen tree, all make kindling] and it said “everyone makes a seat out of the fallen tree.” But leaving aside this humorous, sometimes satirical aspect, the truth is that the final phase of governance in consecrated life is an opportunity to show the evangelical aspect of service. It is a great witness that can be given in consecrated life and in the Church. Foreseeing the temporality of the governance and that it does not last for a long time, makes possible the evangelical sense of detachment, the gratuitousness in the exercise of authority, and, above all, the hope in the life of the institutes themselves. As we are in the era of efficiency, in a “throwaway culture,” there are many who speak

¹⁷⁸ SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1, 11.4.

of how superiors should be and act, but there are few who indicate how to prepare to leave governance.

1. In this final stage it is good to meditate on the words of Jesus: *“It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you”* (Jn 16:7). The action of the Spirit continues. There are always successors, alternatives to follow your work and take it to perfection.

2. Consider that governance is a means and not an end; that it is only one link connected to another link and which will connect to another. Ask for the wisdom of knowing how to leave leadership and make the transfer.

3. Maintain a spirit of service as if you were starting out. There is always time to break open the future with renewed strength and keep moving forward.

4. Take advantage of every occasion to make your brothers and sisters grow in hope, because you have experienced the assistance of the Spirit and the presence of Mary in your lives and in your work.

5. Show that the charisms of the Institutes are alive in the communities, are fruitful in the diversity of cultures and are capable of undertaking new ways of evangelization.

6. Try to govern responsibly until the end and without committing the next governments to something they are not going to be able to continue.

7. Do not be surprised by the solitude that, perhaps, you have already begun to experience.

8. Although governance ends, prepare to continue helping the Congregations in other ways: offering the young generations the witness of your exemplariness and consistency.

9. Keep convincing yourself that we are owed nothing: *“We are unprofitable servants”* (Lk 17:10). Insist in your prayer: *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.”*

10. Since no one is free of making mistakes, trust in the mercy of God and in the understanding and compassion of your brothers and sisters.”¹⁷⁹

1. In the Leaders' Lives There Is an After

Leading is over, but it is not the end of the people who have been leading. The *after* has another trajectory that, to a large extent, depends on the position adopted during the service itself. Leaders who have led in the presence of the Lord with interior freedom, with humility and with sincere love; who have been honest in their communication and have celebrated the successes of all; who have taken risks in the face of great challenges and have accepted misunderstandings and opposition with patience, have opened a splendid future. In principle, they cannot, should not be considered finished or burned out, as they say. On the contrary, they are prepared for new goals and maybe even more challenging ones. Wherever they go, whatever new services they are in,

¹⁷⁹ The full text of *“Suggestions for a superior general in his three or four phases”* is collected in AQUILINO BOCOS MERINO. *Tiempos de comunión y de misión*. Madrid: PCI, 2008, pp. 607-613.

they will live up to their spiritual disposition. Positions are not what dignify people, rather people dignify positions.

It is true that governance wears people out, but it is also a source of new energy. We live in the era of stress and community leaders are also affected by extensive activity and intense responsibility. Only those who allow themselves to be led by selfishness act like the astute administrator (cf. Lk 16:1-8).

The best way to prepare the *after* is to live the present well and fully. This is the secret: *to live the present moment intensely*. Today we suffer from neurosis of the future. We encourage escaping into the future too much. We are burdened. We are worried about retirement and pensions. Power and prestige tempt us and sometimes we give in. We need only observe the sadness that some people show when they leave positions of power or being the guide in everything and for everything. They are assaulted by the melancholy of what has been lost or the insecurity of what may happen.

Pascal rightly said: “We never keep to the present. We recall the past; we anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up, or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does; so vain that we dream of times that are not and blindly flee the only one that is. The fact is that the present usually hurts. We thrust it out of sight because it distresses us, and if we find it enjoyable, we are sorry to see it slip away. We try to give it the support of the future, and think how we are going to arrange things over which we have no control for a time we can never be sure of reaching.

“Let each of us examine his thoughts; he will find them wholly concerned with the past or the future. We almost never think of the present, and if we do think of it, it is only to see what light it throws on our plans for the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means, the future alone our end. Thus, we never actually live, but hope to live, and since we always planning how to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so.”¹⁸⁰

Miguel de Unamuno was irritated that there was talk of the “future” because, he said, the future does not exist. The true future is today. Neither nostalgia nor empty dreams. What gives consistency is to live the present with passion. On the other hand, Paul Valery pointed out: “The problem of our time is that the future is not what it used to be.”

In the present we have the here and now of God for us. The present is a reflection of the saving presence of God, of his providence. To live the present in governance is to be aware of God's will for the communities and for ourselves. This living is dynamic and urgent because it encourages living in full availability and growing fidelity. Let us turn our eyes to Jesus who speaks

¹⁸⁰ BLAISE PASCAL, *Pensees* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 13. In similar terms, Dr. Wayne says: “Present-moment living, getting in touch with your ‘now,’ is at the heart of effective living. When you think about it, there really is no other moment you can ever live. Now is all there is, and the future is just another present moment to live when it arrives. One thing is certain; you cannot live it until it does appear.” DR. WAYNE DYER. *Your Erroneous Zones: Step-by-Step Advice for Escaping the Trap of Negative Thinking and Taking Control of Your Life*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2009.

to us: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear... Look at the birds in the sky... Learn from the way the wild flowers grow... will he not much more provide for you...” (Mt 6:25-34).

The intense life of the present minimizes times and spaces, as well as types of service. Vigilance, openness to surprises and missionary availability take on special value. It is another way of proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus through our own existence. Is not this the most genuine "after" for the one who leads?

2. Knowing How to Leave Leadership and Learning to Live in the Present Moment

Leaving with dignity is the second-to-last service of leaders. Second-to-last because the subsequent journey, which is of witness and collaboration, continues to be open.¹⁸¹ Superiors are, above all, men and women religious, not officials. If, in public and social life, exemplariness is valued today, it has a greater scope in consecrated life because it has been graced with the capacity to represent Jesus' lifestyle. The testimony, the exemplariness, suggests a bonus of moral responsibility over and above the law and the consequent *uniformity of life* (of which Cicero already spoke) and today we say balance or maturity in which all spheres of personality are involved.

The wisdom of leaving leadership is acquired and does not occur spontaneously in the act of changing leadership. Leaders who do not want to be tied to the past with useless longings, have to cultivate this dispossession much earlier. The change begins when, from the perspective of the reality of each day, with a free and open mind, they think of the mission they have accomplished and the legitimate succession. In short, they have the perspective that they are involved in a discernment of the situation in the light of the Spirit. Honest leaders know how to leave leadership, they promote others and make the transfer with generosity without reserving support in order to preserve their position. Has not this been the example that Pope Benedict XVI has given us? Is he not a true open book in which we can find the lessons of humility and honesty?

Jesus gives us a good lesson in his dialogue with Peter in which, after repeatedly asking him if he loves him and asking him to feed his sheep, he adds: “Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (Jn 21:18). It is true that he alluded to the death with which the apostle was going to give glory to God (v. 19) but, for followers of Jesus who serve his flock, it can be interpreted as an invitation to total dispossession. In any case, it is not a decline, it is not a collapse, but rather an entry into the field of serene hope and spiritual childhood. A reconciliation begins with everything that could have caused bitterness, friction, disagreement, and another path opens up towards tolerance, understanding, and harmony.

¹⁸¹ Saint Jane Frances of Chantal spoke to her sisters about the great fruit that the former superiors give by their example. “Because nobody knows what true submission is, except the one who has practiced it after having governed for a long time. I have so much appreciation for those who behave in a befitting way in these cases, which I consider to be one of the best evidences that they can give of their virtue” (*Letter to a Superior*).

Whoever has experienced success in governance cannot forget the quintessential entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem and the tragedy on Calvary. The history of the foundations is full of pages in which the founders have purified their hearts, understanding that, being the work of God, it was He who guided it.

3. The Transition from Action to Passion

Leaving leadership of a local community, a province or an institute is not the same. The proportions of these three spheres are different. When I speak here about the transition from action to passion, I am speaking about the journey of letting go of desires and aspirations that those who are leaving leadership must travel.

The “follow me” that Jesus says to Peter after Peter confessed that he loves Jesus is not only the requirement for leading, but also for facing whatever comes next. As I have indicated, leadership does not end suddenly. There is no radical cut. Leaders have been following a path that began before in humility and in docility to the Spirit. “The absence of power and humility in the spiritual life do not refer to people without a backbone or who abandon decisions into the hands of others. They refer rather to people who love Jesus so deeply that they are ready to follow him wherever he leads them, always trusting that with him they will find life and they will find it in abundance.”¹⁸²

In fact, the life of the institute, the community, continues, and the joy of feeling it pulsate, move, expand, train, get involved on the peripheries and be where they would have only dreamed of going before, is an immense reason for joy and hope. Joy is linked to the distancing of possible personal success or that of the governing team because it imposes the consciousness of having carried out a mission loaded with gifts to which you can only correspond with gratitude.

But also, when leaving leadership, shadows appear, dark places, sometimes unnoticed, of the exercise of authority. Many temptations of power are only perceptible when viewed from a distance.¹⁸³ Post-leadership is an opportunity to support new generations and to celebrate life in communion. The parable of the Prodigal Son offers clues for this return journey, experiencing the welcome of the father and being able to participate in the celebration.¹⁸⁴

The fate of the founders and foundresses and superiors throughout history has been very uneven. Many of them were tested with misunderstandings, distancing and suffering.¹⁸⁵ They showed themselves to be disciples of Jesus, who, “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb 5:8). The majority of them became saints. They were examples of patience,

¹⁸² HENRI J. M. NOUWEN. *En el nombre de Jesús. Un nuevo modelo de responsable de la comunidad cristiana*. Madrid: PPC, 1999, 6ª ed, pp. 66-67. [For the English version see: HENRI J. M. NOUWEN, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections of Christian Leadership*. Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992.]

¹⁸³ I refer to VÁCLAV HAVEL. *Discursos políticos*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1992, pp. 157ss., where he speaks of the temptations of power.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE. “Paradigma del liderazgo cristiano: la parábola del Hijo pródigo”. *VidRel* 112 (2012) 277 y ss.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. MIGUEL ÁNGEL MILLÁN ASÍN. *Liderazgo y gestión. Lo que podemos aprender de los fundadores*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 2013, pp. 114-122.

contemplation, adoration, silence, and humility. They became fruitful by accepting and coping with apparent failure.

Unconsciously we measure ourselves by what we do, by the usefulness we provide, by the possibility of contributing culturally or economically. Being used to action, to serving our brothers and sisters, to programming our lives, it is difficult to change our attitudes to let ourselves be guided and to enjoy the stillness. Jesus taught us to move from action to passion. He preached, he healed and he walked the roads; but on the Mount of Olives he let himself be arrested and he entered the path of suffering until “It is finished.” He taught us the way to the Father according to complete dispossession and according to the return to the roots of loving most fully. With his resurrection he opened us to new life. Therefore, the last word of leadership is to relive the Paschal mystery. Was not this the path we started in our baptism and confirmed in our profession? Leaving leadership is returning to what is essential. It is a song of freedom and of love without limits. It is good to conserve our voice to sing this new song.

CONCLUSION
LEADERSHIP, PROXIMITY AND
MERCY

*“Give thanks to the LORD, who is good,
whose mercy endures forever.”*

(Ps 106:1)

The Jubilee of Mercy convened by Pope Francis represents an opportunity to rethink leadership from the perspective of the most authentic proximity. The encyclical *Dives in misericordia* (John Paul II) and the Bull of the Jubilee *Misericordiae vultus* (Francis) offer us a framework for living the *gift* and the *task* of mercy. I have alluded to compassionate leadership, the kind which Jesus exercised and which resonates in the compassionate presence of the community leaders. Jesus revealed, in his face and in his words, the mercy of the Father.

The variant of the classic “govern with love” is today “govern according to mercy.”¹⁸⁶ The new “art of governing” is based on the “principle of mercy.” Let us think of the vibrations of peace and serene commitment produced by the mere act of pronouncing the word mercy. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, *mercy* has become synonymous with tenderness, affection, compassion, commiseration, forgiveness, mercy, clemency, fidelity, kindness, and grace.¹⁸⁷ The best synthesis is found in Psalm 51, the Miserere, where mercy is seen as grace, the source of joy and hope for the repentant sinner. Mercy helps us to return home, to our true home: the house of the Father in which we are not only received but also cherished, as prodigal children.

In the Gospel of Luke, the leaders of our communities have a mirror where they can see themselves and confront attitudes. Luke, after the canticles of the Benedictus and the Magnificat, highlights how the Holy Spirit was upon Jesus because he was anointed and sent to evangelize the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to restore sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord (cf. Lk 4:18-19; Lk 7:22). Jesus is a friend of the poor and of sinners. He went about in this world doing good (Acts 10:38). He left us three parables about mercy: the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the Prodigal Son.¹⁸⁸ Together with them is the parable of the Good Samaritan, which explains who are our neighbors and the path of accompaniment for their healing.

Saint Matthew narrates the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus proclaims as blessed “the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Mt 5:7). He closes the teaching activity of Jesus with the story of the Last Judgment in which he calls blessed those who have given him food, drink, welcome, clothing, etc. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:31-46).

¹⁸⁶ “In these challenging times, the West must recover its strength in its roots, the energy of its ideal impulse, its creativity, and its morality.” F. ALBERONI, *o. c.*, p. 13. Now, hand in hand with Pope Francis, we go to the source of mercy, which is the love that God has for us. Cf. FERNANDO PRADO AYUSO. *Diez cosas que el papa Francisco te propone en el Año de la Misericordia*. Madrid: PCI, 2015. According to Cardinal W. Kasper, the word mercy is the key to Pope Francis’ pontificate, cf. *El papa Francisco. Revolución de la ternura y el amor*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 2015, pp. 53 y ss.

¹⁸⁷ On what the Bible says about mercy, cf. LUIS HERIBERTO RIVAS. *La Misericordia*. Madrid: PCI, 2015. According to theology, cf. JON SOBRINO, *El principio misericordia: bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1992. WALTER KASPER. *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, Paulist Press (2014). Some authors who speak of the virtues consider that compassion is equivalent to mercy and consider mercy to be forgiveness. Cf. ANDRÉ COMTE-SPONVILLE. *Pequeño tratado de grandes virtudes*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1998.

¹⁸⁸ On this parable, cf. IGNACIO DOMÍNGUEZ. *Misericordia para tiempos ásperos. Una reflexión evangélica sobre el hijo pródigo*. Madrid: Sociedad Atenas, 1996.

Mercy, first of all, is gratuitous. It is the excess of God. It has a foundational character and the ultimate reason of being. The initiative is of the Father who is moved and looks at us with eyes of mercy, as a mother loves. Mercy opens us up to reality and asks for a response at the level of such great love. Jesus asks us to be merciful as the Father is merciful (cf. Lk 6:36).

The two-way street of mercy is called proximity, accompaniment, and, therefore, interest and devotion for our brothers and sisters who suffer injuries of many kinds, e.g. slavery, lack of meaning, not identifying with the congregation, addictions, crises from age, loneliness, illness, exclusions, sin, deficiencies in theological life, spiritual anemia, infidelities in poverty, chastity and obedience, lack of appreciation and recognition, etc. There are also community wounds from routine, fatigue, insensitivity to questions or pastoral challenges, broken relationships, lack of communication, distrust and suspicion, etc. There are so many of our wounds and those that are out there, in the peripheries, waiting for us!¹⁸⁹ Many of our communities are asking to be looked at with eyes of mercy. They do not stop dreaming and they want to take risks. Frequently they lack that touch of the Spirit to go forth and get involved in new commitments.¹⁹⁰

As I have been saying, in governance, *presence*, *use of time* and *cordiality* are united. These are dispositions that qualify the way of serving individuals and communities. Cordiality is the expression of tenderness, which implies empathy, putting ourselves in the place of the other, speaking from heart to heart, welcoming warmly, forgiving promptly, concern, and thoughtfulness for the other. Cordiality is the best packaging for mercy. It makes us be present with all our hearts and involves us in the revolution of tenderness. Tenderness is God's dream for humanity.¹⁹¹

Leading according to mercy is going to the other shore, taking our time, and taking on the anguish of the excluded. It is opening ourselves up to the reality of suffering. A few years ago, Jeffrey Krames published a book entitled “*Lead with Humility. 12 Leadership Lessons from Pope Francis.*” To lead according to mercy does not appear among them; however he is a model and teacher of this attitude. His episcopal motto is “*Miserando atque eligendo*,” [by mercifully choosing], according to the text of Matthew, “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow me’” (Cf. Mt 9:9). The Pope translates this Latin gerund as “*mercy-ing*.”¹⁹² It can be said that the twelve lessons mentioned are steeped in mercy.¹⁹³ He is close to everyone, but we know of the actions he undertakes on behalf of the

¹⁸⁹ “I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds... And you have to start from the ground up.” POPE FRANCIS. *Interview* by Fr. Antonio Spadaro (Aug. 19, 2013).

¹⁹⁰ LUIS A. GONZÁLEZ DÍEZ. “Recrear la visión para conquistar la comunidad”. *Vida Religiosa*. «La comunidad, terapia y escuela para la misión», 3 (2015) 7-26.

¹⁹¹ CARLO ROCCHETTA. *Teología de la ternura. Un «evangelio» por descubrir*. Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2001, pp. 425-429.

¹⁹² Cf. ANTONIO SPADARO. *Interview with Pope Francis*. August 19, 2013, 3.

¹⁹³ Jeffrey Krames is a major leadership expert. These are the titles of the twelve chapters: Lead with Humility. Smell Like Your Flock. Who Am I to Judge? Don’t Change - Reinvent. Make Inclusion a Top Priority. Avoid Insularity. Choose Pragmatism over Ideology. Employ the Optics of Decision Making. Run Your Organization Like a Field

poor, refugees, the persecuted, the weak, children who have suffered abuse, gypsies, the people who do not count in the eyes of the powerful, those who are in the existential peripheries where precariousness, suffering and marginalization are strong challenges to us.

Leading according to mercy is to lead according to proximity because it is to lead according to presence. Leadership actualizes the presence of God who is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (cf. Ex 34:6; Ps 86:15; Jl 2:13). In the poor is the temple where God resides because He has preferred it. The poor make Jesus present, the face of the Father's mercy (Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father...", "Whatever you did for one of these..."). Merciful leaders make Jesus present when they look after the poor on behalf of themselves and the community. In short, when they practice mercy.¹⁹⁴

To govern with a merciful and compassionate heart is to know how to forgive and to love. Mercy and compassion are embodied by Jesus as the Son of God and as true man. Mercy refers to the forgiveness of our sins. At this point, what is pointed out in the Instruction *"The Service of Authority and Obedience"* is very clear. "St. Francis of Assisi, in a moving letter to a minister/superior, gave the following instructions about the possible personal weaknesses of his brothers: 'And in this I want to know, if you love the Lord and myself, His servant and yours, if you have done this, namely, that there be no friar in the world, who has sinned, as much as one could sin, that, after he has seen your eyes, never leaves without your mercy, if he seeks mercy. And if he would not seek mercy, you are to ask him if he wants mercy. And if afterwards he would have sinned a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me for this, so that you draw him to the Lord; and you are to always pity such ones.'" And the text of the Instruction continues: "Persons in authority are called to develop a pedagogy of forgiveness and mercy, that is, to be instruments of the love of God that welcomes, corrects and always gives another chance to the brother or sister who makes a mistake and falls into sin. Above all they will need to remember that without hope of forgiveness a person finds it hard to get back on the path and tends inevitably to add wrong to wrong and failings to failings. The perspective of mercy, instead, affirms that God is able to draw out, even from sinful situations, a way that leads towards the good. May persons in authority spare no efforts so that the whole community may learn this merciful style."¹⁹⁵

Compassion speaks to us of tenderness, of endearing love. It is the human dimension, which Jesus also expressed before the crowd (Mk 6:34) and before the widow of Nain (cf. Lk 7:13). Faced with these facts, Pope Francis adds: "God loves us in this way with compassion and mercy. Jesus does not look at reality from the outside, without letting himself be moved, as if he were taking a picture. He lets himself get involved. This kind of compassion is needed today to conquer the globalization of indifference. This kind of regard is needed when we find ourselves in

Hospital. Live on the Frontier. Confront Adversity Head-On. Pay Attention to Noncustomers. *Lead with Humility. 12 Leadership Lessons from Pope Francis.* New York: AMACOM, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. AA.VV. *Colección Obras de Misericordia.* Madrid: PCI, 2015, 14 vols., 896 pp.

¹⁹⁵ SAO, 25.

front of a poor person, an outcast, or a sinner. This is the compassion that nourishes the awareness that we, too, are sinners.”¹⁹⁶

Anyone who wants to govern a community according to compassion should help it move from the culture of statistics and data and percentages that social media offer - sometimes covering the truth of the reality of those who suffer - to the concrete experience and direct encounter with the person who suffers, who demands my response and who provokes the beginning of the process to accompany and suffer with the other.¹⁹⁷

To govern with mercy is to take a risk and be daring. There is an underlying nobility of heart. Those who feel loved, go further, take risks, and dare to love. Those who experience gratuitousness in love – mercy – break the mold, clear the paths, and become uninhibited; they begin to have spontaneous looks of faith, love, and hope towards the other. They know how to unite justice and compassion.¹⁹⁸ Personal relationships are freer and more authentic. It supposes they have been freed of fears and can accept things that are different or out of the ordinary that may come their way. It is taking the risk to initiate processes of transformation so that in their hearts and in their homes, there begins to be room for what should not be excluded.

“If one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rm 12:8). To express gratitude for the loving mercy of our God and to make it contagious in this world, I suggest: 1) meditating and praying with the Magnificat; 2) meditating and praying with Psalm 51 (the Miserere); and 3) meditating and praying with the Salve. Here are two texts referring to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who knew a lot about closeness and proximity: “The Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28), and “Woman, behold, your son” (Jn 19:26). With gratitude, reconciliation, and hope, the heart widens and the works of mercy spring forth spontaneously. Our passion will be expressed in gestures of compassion, especially with the poor and helpless. We will confirm that merciful governance advances - makes closer - the Kingdom. That is what it is all about.

¹⁹⁶ POPE FRANCIS. *The Name of God is Mercy. A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli*. New York: Random House, 2016, p. 92.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. LUIS ALFONSO ARANGUREN. “Compasión”. In: *Diccionario de pensamiento contemporáneo*. Madrid, 1997, pp. 198-199. Later he adds: “The mass-media present a model of compassion centered on the spectacle of pain, provoking strong emotions that frequently generate aggression, impotence, and insensibility, and that imposes itself as a channel of help for those who suffer. We must bear in mind that, although this form of help may be valid for some, it runs the risk of distorting and reducing the true sense of compassion” (p.199).

¹⁹⁸ Cf. EMILIO BARCELÓN MAICAS. “El carisma de la misericordia en el ejercicio de la autoridad: Hacia un gobierno samaritano”. *Rev. Teología Espiritual* 51 (2007) 291-337. Saint Gregory the Great said: “To the vices we owe harshness, but to nature, compassion; because, if the sinner is to be scourged, the neighbor must be held.” *In Evangelium*, I, 4, 2s.

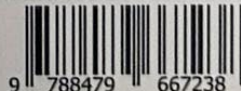


The presence and proximity of the leader or superior is an important issue to be considered in the governance of consecrated life. The quality of government - and of community life - depends, surely, on the presence and proximity of those who govern communities of consecrated persons.

Today, the theme of leadership occupies a relevant space in the business, socio-political, and sports world, which insists on it as vision, service, organization, and motivation. Our model, as consecrated persons, is always Jesus. In him we see the traits of presence and closeness proper to those who have to serve their brothers and sisters through leadership and government, promoting the living out of the mystery, communion, and mission.



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