

**THE “GOOD AND JUST” EXERCISE OF POWER  
IN RELIGIOUS LIFE**

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On 22 November 2018, the UISG Canon Law Workshop met in Rome on the theme *The “Good and Just” Exercise of Power in Religious Life*.

This theme is very topical and urgently requires deep reflection and a suitable response. Pope Francis in his *Letter to the People of God*, dated 20 August 2018, expressly asks that all the “members of the People of God” contribute, with their active participation, in the “conversion of our activity as a Church” against “sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience.”

In response to this call, the UISG, as a union composed of nearly 2000 leaders of religious congregations present all over the world, in addition to expressing its pain and indignation for every form of abuse perpetrated inside and outside the Church, has decided to create paths of formation for the “good and just” exercise of power in the sphere of religious life, with the desire and the intent that we may grow together in awareness and in the capacity to act for the good.

### **Sr. Simona Paolini, FMGB**

#### ***The Concept of Power in the Canon Law Code between “Potestas” and “Auctoritas”***

Every time the power fails to be real support so that every religious is guaranteed what is needed to carry out the purpose of his/her vocation, power is poorly exercised (cf. can. 670); whenever superiors do not consciously assume the task of formation in their own institute, there is incorrect use of power; whenever superiors do not work to adapt the apostolate of their institute to the concrete historical needs with creative fidelity, there is incorrect exercise of authority.

### **Sr. Tiziana Merletti, SFP**

#### ***The shady areas in power: how can they be crossed?***

This contribution intends to explore the issue of power abuse within feminine consecrated life, starting with the shady zones produced by the exercise of power. The aim is not to enumerate the traps into which, despite our good faith, we risk falling, then letting ourselves get discouraged because we do not see any way out. We will not try, on the other hand, to find easy answers to how these shady zones can be crossed. I rather intend to identify the appropriate questions that will allow us, at least, to benefit from the probable umpteenth fall into the shady zone.

**Sr. Elisabetta Flick, SA**

***To One Who Exercises Power Jesus Says...***

The fact that Jesus' public life begins and ends with temptations related to how he exercises his power as God's Son resounds like a constant call and invitation to recognize that, whenever power is exercised, there is always the temptation and the possibility of power abuse, which is always, in one way or another, the use of power for one's own advantage. Now, one just has to open a newspaper and study a bit of history to see that, truly, in several countries, "*the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.*" We must recognize that, unfortunately, in the Church and in religious life too, there is real power abuse; and this fact underscores the importance of daring to look straight at the temptations alive within us and being able to reject them, or rather exercising the power that Jesus gives to his disciples to cast out demons.

**Fr. David Glenday, MCCJ**

***Prayer at the heart of the Chapter***

To live the Chapter as *a gift of prayer*. To live prayer as the very heart of the Chapter, not merely as a very essential preparation, nor merely as a very essential accompaniment but prayer as the place where our Chapters are born, from where they are generated, where the decisions and orientations of the Chapter are conceived. Prayer as the place where the Chapter finds its courage, hope, strength imagination, creativity.

# THE CONCEPT OF POWER IN THE CANON LAW CODE BETWEEN “POTESTAS” AND “AUCTORITAS”

Sr. Simona Paolini, FMGB

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*This text was presented at the UISG Workshop of Canon Law in Rome on 22 November 2018.*

*Original in Italian*

The issue of authority is becoming an urgency and an actuality in this time of the Church, marked by the reflection of Pope Francis who, in the *Letter to the People of God*, dated 20 August 2018, evokes forms of abuse and speaks about three that not only include sexual abuse but also mentions abuse of power and abuse of conscience.

*“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.*

Regarding this reading, the Holy Father moreover asks the entire People of God to react, with a multifaceted ecclesial act:

*It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People. Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives.*

*This clearly manifests itself in an abnormal way of understanding authority in the Church, yet very common in many communities where sexual abuse, abuse of power and abuse of conscience have occurred—i.e., clericalism, an attitude that “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and*

*undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.”*

Hence, the need has emerged in the UISG to participate in the elaboration of this response against all forms of abuse, by conceiving paths of formation in view of “good and just” exercise of power in the context of religious life.

### **A simple "*Explicatio Terminorum*"**

The aim of this reflection is, therefore, an education to the “good and just” exercise of power. Yet, we first need to get a better understanding of the qualifying value of these two adjectives, chosen to define the form of authority that the Church expects of her ministers today.

*Good* is to be understood not so much in the sense of what is correct, but what pursues the good, because it is ordered to the realization of the common good, the good that is such because it is authentic and belongs to everyone. This dimension of “communality” of the good is well explained in the Pope’s Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* (2015), precisely with regard to the *care for the common home*. This Letter explicates how the common good is the one capable of offering all those “conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment” (LS 156).

On the other hand, the *just* exercise of authority is not merely legitimate but rather intervention according to the *proprium*, the specificity of a situation; in this case, what pertains to religious life, in view of its realization and modulated according to its criteria.

Everything that is not included in these two modalities is foreign to the exercise that the Church expects today from those who have been invested with the power of authority.

We need to further clarify the terms used in the title of this intervention: “*Potestas*” and “*Auctoritas*”— authority and power.

In ecclesiastical language, *authority* is not understood in the ordinary sense of a propensity toward growth, inciting progress, which is easily deduced from the etymological reference to the Latin verb *augeo*, with the derivative semantic value of *status superioris* of the person who is invested with powers and the function of commanding; the term is understood, in fact, in the sense of ἐξουσία, i.e., the participation in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Κύριος, whose authority drives history towards the advent of the Kingdom of God. In the People of God, authority originates and is qualified in the authority of God, from whom every authority descends, because as the Apostle Paul teaches: “*there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*” (Rom 13:1).

Authority’s divine nature expresses its transcendent character; therefore, it is wrong to limit the understanding exclusively to the use of human categories or typically social criteria.

Moreover, an ecclesial authority, because it is defined as a service to the Church, as can. 618 says at the beginning of chapter II on the Governance of Institutes, stipulating that:

"Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service".

Authority is, therefore, not "an unavoidable, rather theologically irrelevant or even harmful exterior entity, but in its essential core belongs to the concreteness of the incarnation";<sup>1</sup> although the authoritative dimension does not belong to the constituent and vivifying principle of the Church, whose foundation lies, by the will of its Founder, in the Word and in the Sacraments, lived in the grace of communion, it is a structuring dimension of the Church that emerges in her institution as a concrete sign of unity and communion with God and among men (cf. LG 1).

It is in ecclesial communion, as constitutive of ecclesial life that authority finds its justification; it is the communal community dimension that requires the service of authority, according to precise aims, recognized by the Church—canonically approved—ordered to achieve the good of the ecclesial community.

Authority is linked to *potestas* or power, or its concrete form. *Potestas* indicates a mode of exercising authority, typical of a stipulation of authority. It is, therefore, necessarily inherent to a charge, because it consists in the exercise of a power provided in view of specific functions.

Consequently, while authority indicates a general service of governance, the *postestas* determines with precision its terms, methods, and limits. Authority is that general exercise of power, defined according to the different ecclesiastical competences.

The bond between the authority and the service to which it is assigned determines the *potestas* and, hence, it is an authority's *teleological form*, in other words, that is defined by its purpose.

Consequently, there is no authority that does not have its own purpose and a typical orientation; and the power is precisely qualified by these dimensions.

## Forms of power

The understanding power as a concrete and specific mode of authority makes it necessary to analyze the typicality of the forms of implementation.

The power of governance can be defined differently in relation to the *ambit*.

Therefore, we call *ordinary power*, that which is attached to a typical office, the law itself defining that form of power inherent to it. Accordingly, this faculty derives its origin and its nature not so much from an occasional concession or a typical conferment, but from its own stable and direct attribution by a juridical disposition, since it is inherent to the office itself—a full and complete power tied to the competences of that office.

On the other hand, *delegated power* is granted not by virtue of an office, but in a specific situation: either to a person, or for a circumstance or a period of time; hence, this power strongly limited by the very mandate that grants it. In the case of delegated power, it is not merely essential but also important that the delegation clearly establishes the ambits and modalities, so that this power is defined, and inviolable forms of its exercise deterred.

The power of governance can also be defined in relation to the *form*.

Hence, a power of governance *ordinary* because it is full and total, immediate and general in relation to the assumed office.

Yet, it can also be *ordinary* and nevertheless *vicarious*, and so inherent to an office because it is ordinarily granted, but in the vicarial form, since it is exercised in the name of another, when the one who fully holds it is not present. However, when the holder is absent, the power is not attributed to another by the ordinary holder, but rather by direct concession or explicit delegation, and normally exercised by the holder's vicar, who does so by virtue of the power inherent in his /her office, which is equally full and total, although only vicarial, i.e., in the absence of the ordinary holder.

The form of *loss* also determines different modes of the power of governance.

The power is extinguished either *ordinarily* or through the legitimate loss of the office to which it is annexed, or when the objective is completed, the time has ended, the number of established cases is exhausted, the final cause has ceased, in the case of a power granted by delegation. The delegated power may also be extinguished by revocation of the delegating party, directly intimated to the delegate, or by the delegate's renunciation, made known to the delegator and accepted by him/her; however, the right of the delegating party does not cease to exist, unless the condition is not provided for in the mandate of the delegation.

However, the power can also be extinguished by the non-ordinary loss of the ecclesiastical office to which it is annexed, by renunciation, transfer, removal, privation; these are very different cases.

While renunciation (cf. cann. 187-189) and transfer (cf. cann. 190-191) are non-ordinary forms but normally foreseen, both removal (cf. cann. 192-195) and privation (cf. can. 196) represent real and extreme cases, which can only be implemented in very specific, duly established situations, by the authority who conferred the power of office, or by the law itself. Renunciation and transfer represent situations in which a just and proportionate cause grants either to the legitimate holder or to the person who holds the right to confer the office, to modify the ordinary loss of power. In the case of renunciation, the holder of a power may, for a just and proportionate reason, can ask—although formally, either in writing or orally before two witnesses—to the person responsible for conferring the office, to be relieved of his/her duties; in the case of a transfer, on the other hand, passing from one office to another is envisaged and requires the intervention of both authorities who confer the power.

Removal and privation are of a completely different nature; both are foreseen in the presence of serious reasons, according to a precise procedure defined by law. Furthermore, this form of loss that is defined as a punishment, implemented after a crime.

### What sort of power in Religious Life?

This ecclesiastical meaning of authority takes on yet another specific trait in the sphere of religious life, clearly defined in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*,<sup>2</sup> which deals with the issue in two precise ambits: among the norms common to all Institutes of consecrated life, in can. 596, and in the section dedicated to Institutes of religious life, of which chap. II is entirely dedicated to the *Governance of Institutes* and contains 3 distinct articles on *Superiors and Councils* (Art. 1), *Chapters* (Art. 2), and *Temporal Goods and Their Administration* (Art. 3).

In religious life, power is clearly a fundamental aspect of this form of life. Starting from the assumption that power has an ultra-organizational function, conceived rather for the implementation of the transition “from society to synodality and collegiality, in view of the *communio*,”<sup>3</sup> we see that it is, consequently, necessary in a system that is understood as a society.

Can. 607 defines a religious institute as a *societas*, or a relational structure, in which the connections between the parts constitute the vital fabric of that group of people. A religious institute is, therefore, a structure developed around the relationships that exist between the different members incorporated into this institute through the profession of the evangelical counsels, assumed in the form of public vows, who are from that moment on expected to observe of their own right and to share fraternal life in community. This social structure, which revolves around the participation in the institute’s charismatic heritage, implies formation in accordance with this heritage and requires dedication to its mission as well as the adoption of a defined form of life, with its obligations and rights. Each member can enter into this social structure only by professing the evangelical counsels, which entail the obligation to observe the three evangelical counsels that produce the double effect of consecration to God and incorporation into the institute.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, if we assert that the correspondence between the purpose of the service of authority and the forms of the *postestas*—the power whose nature, forms and limits recall the nature, forms and limits of the society—is evident, then we understand how power, in religious life, must assume the typical dimensions of this special form of Christian life, distinguished by a new and special title, assuming the evangelical counsels given for the Christian life of every baptized person.

Can. 596, which concerns all institutes of consecrated life, allows us to understand how the foreseen power is distinct, by subject, by object, by source, and by value. The distinction by subject distinguishes between a personal authority—the Superiors—and a collegial authority—the Chapters; it is also distinguished by



object, in fact this is a power directed at *the members* of the institute, without any further definition; it is, furthermore, distinct by source, referring either to the universal law or to the proper law; finally, it is distinguished by value, between a general *potestas*—for all institutes of consecrated life—and an ecclesiastical power of governance—only for clerical institutes and those of the pontifical right.<sup>5</sup>

In 1983 CIC, the choice was made to abandon the distinction between public and private power, better defined as dominative, referred to in the Code of 1917. In the first Code, a power of a private nature was established for non-clerical Institutes, considered as familial, that is domestic, echoing that of the *pater familias*, recognized by Roman law as the necessary authority for the common good, self-established for the bond between the members, by the nature of the pact, according to the ties of the relationship. The current Code has abandoned this adjectivization, omitting the dominative and adopting instead the general ecclesial attribute, because it is to be understood according to the *sensus Ecclesiae*.

Power in religious life is, therefore, comparable to that of government and, accordingly, executive, as can be inferred from the nature of the competences in matters of formation or the apostolate attributed to those who exercise this power; yet, this power is not equivalent to that of an ecclesiastical ordinary. Hence, it is a power of jurisdiction—that is of governance—but it is limited to the ambit of the institute of consecrated life in which it is placed.

These considerations help us to recognize the power in the institutes of consecrated life as a public ecclesiastical power, where “ecclesiastical” refers to the ecclesiastical office to which it is connected and “public” recalls the nature of an ecclesiastical public juridical person, recognized in every institute of consecrated life that is canonically erected.

To this general understanding of power in the consecrated life, the Legislator adds further specifications for religious life, where power is understood as a service of protection. The first protection required of the power of Superiors is that which regards the vocation of each individual member. Therefore, Superiors are the accompanists of the journey of the members of the institute, from the initial phase in which the Superiors are responsible for formation and must then operate the delicate discernment in view of admission into the institute, up to the painful decisions concerning separation from institution. The Superiors are, likewise, expected to provide careful protection in the pastoral field; they, in fact, have the duty to discern thoughtfully the adaptation of their works. Institutions are asked to be cautious and careful in adapting to the needs of times and places, including the adoption of new and convenient means, while remaining faithful to their mission and their works.

We deduce that the religious *potestas* is above all an authority of custody that is called to care responsibly, wisely and prudently for a gift of grace received, which has been recognized in a charisma approved and then legitimized by the Church, and entrusted exclusively to Her and to its ministers, so that they may preserve it as a gift from God.

## Abuses in the exercise of power

In his letter, the Holy Father is not afraid to indicate the danger of power exercised in a distorted way and, so, to speak about real abuse of power.

The law states that there is abuse of power in the case of *usurpation* and *abuse*.

Usurpation denotes a non-correspondence between the *de facto* and the *de iure*—i.e., the situation in which acts are carried out in a conscious and deliberate manner, for which the person is imputable, although these acts do not correspond to the real juridical condition of whoever holds the power. In this case, there is no legitimate title.

The situation of abuse is different, because in this case there is an encroachment of powers, so that the person remains—in the substance, the modalities, the actions, and within the limits imposed—within the parameters legitimately attributed by law; he/she is indeed a legitimate and effective holder of authority, yet has consciously and maliciously exercised this power in a distorted manner, exceeding the purpose, overstepping the conferred ambits, and hence there likewise no correspondence between the attribute faculty and the power exercised.

However, the definitions of formally and legally defined abuse appear insufficient to define the variety of forms of abuse of authority; it will be necessary to speak of abuse of power whenever the exercise of this authority is not ordered to the ends carefully outlined, with a series of binding and cogent imperatives, in cann. 618-619<sup>66</sup> 1983 CIC, can. 618:

Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service. Therefore, docile to the will of God in fulfilling their function, 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.

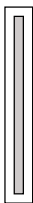
Every time the power fails to be real support so that every religious is guaranteed what is needed to carry out the purpose of his/her vocation, power is poorly exercised (cf. can. 670); whenever superiors do not consciously assume the task of formation in their own institute, there is incorrect use of power; whenever superiors do not work to adapt the apostolate of their institute to the concrete historical needs with creative fidelity, there is incorrect exercise of authority.

The good and just exercise of power is certainly a way of working in the Church that pushes far beyond abstaining from wrongdoing or negligence and rather evokes a humble ministry carried out for the portion of the Church called in the religious institute, in which those who are called to exercise power must do so in the ecclesial terms of an evangelical service of authority, whose limits, conditions, and finality are determined by the newness of the Gospel and the redeeming power of the Risen Lord.

- <sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, *La comunione nella Chiesa*, Milano, 2004, 155.
- <sup>2</sup> Henceforth, 1983 CIC.
- <sup>3</sup> S. PAOLINI, *L'approvazione del diritto proprio per gli Istituti di vita consacrata*, ex can. 587, Venezia, 2014, 126.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. 1983 CIC, can. 654: By religious profession, members assume the observance of the three evangelical counsels by public vow, are consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church, and are incorporated into the institute with the rights and duties defined by law.
- <sup>5</sup> 1983 CIC, can. 596—§ 1. Superiors and chapters of institutes possess that power over members which is defined in universal law and the constitutions. § 2. In clerical religious institutes of pontifical right, however, they also possess ecclesiastical power of governance for both the external and internal forum. § 3. The prescripts of cann. 131, 133, and 137-144 apply to the power mentioned in §1.
- <sup>6</sup> 1983 CIC, can. 618: Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service.

Therefore, docile to the will of God in fulfilling their function, 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.

Can. 619: 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, in which God is sought and loved before all things. Therefore, 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.



## THE SHADY AREAS IN POWER: HOW CAN THEY BE CROSSED?

Sr. Tiziana Merletti, SFP

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*This text was presented at the UISG Workshop of Canon Law in Rome on 22 November 2018.*

*Original in Italian*

Pope Francis, in his recent *Letter to the People of God*,<sup>1</sup> concentrates his reflection on the infected wound in the ecclesial body caused by abuses committed by clergymen and consecrated persons that have harmed minors and adults in situations of vulnerability. The Pope has singled out three types: sexual abuse, power abuse, and the abuse of conscience. This contribution intends to explore the issue of power abuse within feminine consecrated life, starting with the shady zones produced by the exercise of power. The aim is not to enumerate the traps into which, despite our good faith, we risk falling, then letting ourselves get discouraged because we do not see any way out. We want to reflect together, instead, so that we can name these situations, grow in awareness, and increase our ability to act for the good. We will not try, on the other hand, to find easy answers to how these shady zones can be crossed. I rather intend to identify the appropriate questions that will allow us, at least, to benefit from the probable umpteenth fall into the shady zone.

Let us begin by asking ourselves: What do we understand by power?

*Power is simply the ability to act...*

*If the ability to act is not focused*

*by a sense of aim*

*or by a sense of spirituality*

*or by a sense of service,*

*then it will eliminate life.*

(Stewart Emery)<sup>2</sup>

In other words, power is the possibility of building, with those around us, an ideal “good” that generates life. This concept is, therefore, very positive, a treasure to be well-administrated in this time which is so fluid, doubtful, and at the mercy of leaders with other motivations.

## From the Holy Scriptures

Among many texts in the Holy Scriptures, I have chosen to quote St. Paul assertion: “there is no authority except from God” (Rom 13:1). Here, the Greek term used to refer to authority/power is: *ἐξουσία* = the power that Jesus received from God and shared on earth... even with the women!

St. Paul also says: “For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of “dependence” on her head, because of the angels” (1 Cor 11:10). In fact, the Greek verb used here is precisely *ἐξουσία*, (authority) and we have no difficulty understanding why it has been translated by the word “dependence”!

## From the Magisterium

Pope John XXIII comments this verse of St. Paul with the words of St. John Chrysostom:

“What are you saying? Is every ruler appointed by God? No, that is not what I mean, he says, for I am not now talking about individual rulers, but about authority as such. My contention is that the existence of a ruling authority—the fact that some should command and others obey, and that all things not come about as the result of blind chance—this is a provision of divine wisdom.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, it is precisely by the divine will that the society<sup>4</sup> of the human beings is made fruitful, also through the authority’s contribution in view of “the common welfare.”<sup>5</sup>

This is, therefore, not said of an uncontrolled force, but rather of a faculty of commanding according to reason, based on the moral order, as Pope John XXIII underscores: “Consequently, laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience, since “it is right to obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29). Indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse. [...] ‘A law which is at variance with reason is to that extent unjust and has no longer the rationale of law. It is rather an act of violence’.”<sup>6</sup>

## Shady areas

We now want to ask ourselves how power and shady areas constitute the two faces of the same coin. By shady area we mean something that exists only in the presence of the light. In fact, the exercise of power is precisely the light that brings into view the gifts and abilities that we can use to influence reality, to create and make a vision progress, understanding personally and helping others to understand, while concretely using our resources to reach an objective that is beyond us: God's Kingdom in our midst.

At the same time, the exercise of power somehow produces a sense of discomfort (sentiments of failure, impotence, being caught, fear, stiffness) that originates in both the psychological and spiritual dimensions. Often, we tend to project the emerging deficiencies and defects outside, but they are, in fact, ours... therefore, it is up to us to face them and transform them into an occasion for growth and make them fruitful as best we can.

In fact, the recognized and accepted shady area is:

*positive  
stimulating  
a source of new energy  
the driving force of generative leadership  
the guarantee of "legitimate"—vs. "unfair"—exercise of government.*

Let us now examine some situations that fall under the responsibility of the religious Superiors and that may contain hidden occasions for falling into the trap of "bad and unjust" use of power, i.e., the shady areas that must be faced.

## Shady area: the role of identity

Can. 617: "Superiors are to fulfill their function and exercise their power according to the norm of universal and proper law."

The exercise of power in the consecrated life is of a spiritual and temporal nature, with the fundamental character of *diaconia*. It moves between the responsibility for establishing who and how the members should work to achieve the pastoral/ministerial result (mission) entrusted to the institute by the Church and the care for the good of the past, present, and future, members themselves.

Another constitutive, accompanying datum is the fact that both those who exercise power and those who represent the available "resources" have concretely made available for the Gospel "the whole of our existence (as clerics and consecrated persons), and a true 'alterity' between the person as such and the ecclesially covered status/office/ ministry is no longer possible."<sup>7</sup> There is, hence, the risk of identification between the individual's personal path and the role that he/she plays. This dimension is also accompanied by the fact that, before the Second Vatican Council, the authority-members rapport was based on the moral virtue of obedience. After the Council, personal adhesion to God's plan gradually replaced personal submission. This not painless change strongly challenges the aptitude for coresponsibility and discernment that cannot be improvised.

The shady area, indeed, becomes the identification with the role, offering security, certain parameters, familiar paths of giving. Yet, unfortunately, the role, the office passes, or better it remains after us, and we are called to go on to something else. And it is in this something else that our being is stripped within the phases of our spiritual life, and so we continue on the same path, with our poor baggage, without any “crutch” capable of filling the gap left by the role.

**For reflection:** Thanks to whom / what am I able to dis-identify with the role that I am playing at present?

### Shady area: naif leadership

Connected with the preceding shady area is the consideration of the fact that acting “as God’s representatives” (can. 601 = light) creates in the superiors the conditions for the emergence of the experience of a shady area that we will call “naif leadership.”

This is a definition that derives from the “naif psychology” or, said in another way, common sense.

This theory is characterized by the fact of **attributing to events a sense** based on **shared dimensions of meaning** that support the perception that the world in which we live should be **foreseeable and checkable** because they can be referred to stable mechanisms that govern it.

This concept of ingenuity, transposed to the theme of our reflection, leads us to make some considerations:

- 1) In consecrated life, power is placed in the hands of some members, legitimately elected for a determinate period of time, so that they may exercise leadership, in the light of the charism, in the service of the good of the institute and of the Church. The members are expected to recognize the action of the Spirit and spontaneously adhere to everything that is proposed.
- 2) In fact, according to some studies of the philosophy of power, “decentralized” resistance, that is actually another power activated from the peripheries, is necessarily associated with it. Now, this is not a phenomenon that could end at a certain point, for example, by invoking the vow of obedience, because “it is identified with an always open, never-ending process.”<sup>8</sup>
- 3) The naif leader simply does not recognize the phenomenon of the anti-leadership among the expected attitude in the culture of consecrated life and falls into the trap of feeling that it is a counterforce, beyond her control. This leads to some possible reactions: the perception of being personally attacked, paranoia (with the need to control through micro-managing), martyrdom (*I decide to sacrifice myself like an immolated victim for the institute in the hands of the “enemy, the prince of this world” who is putting us to the test!*).
- 4) A leader who, on the contrary, has evolved will consider the anti-leadership a physiologic phenomenon and try to deal with it as “positive” energy, saying to herself: “This opposition it is not happening *to me*, but *for me*.”

Consequently, she will activate channels of dialogue, listening, exchange, and particularly “losing oneself” to enter into another dimension.

How, then, can these two personal shady areas be crossed?

- Honest and courageous knowledge of oneself
- Formation which includes frequenting knowledge and perspective of different people
- Taking time (for deep prayer and also to relax)
- Learn to make dead-ends into opportunities
- Training in the art of asking questions

**For Reflection:** How do I rediscover myself “naïf” in the exercise of power? I name situations of anti-leadership that help me in this process.

### Shady area: abuse in the exercise of power

We will now consider another possible shady area that has its origin in the potentialities of power: that is its abuse, which may be pursued voluntarily or is a consequence of its bad management—put in juridical terms: its negligence.

As has already been said, in the Letter to the People of God, published last August 20<sup>th</sup>, Pope Francis talks about 3 types of abuses with regard to which there is “tolerance zero”, because it strikes minors and adults in situations of vulnerability:

- **Sexual abuse** – sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, committed by force or threats or publicly or with a minor below the age of eighteen years, (can. 1395).
- **Power abuse** – “abusing of one’s role, function and the like. H” vexation, overbearingness, prevarication, oppression, browbeating.”<sup>9</sup>
- **Abuse of conscience** – “Less visible than that sexual abuse, it is nevertheless abuse, because it takes advantage of the other’s trust, by imposing on others, with authoritarianism, indications on forcing him/her to live in a certain manner, and its consequences are borne above all by the most fragile and vulnerable persons. The abuse of conscience advances underground and silently in faith communities, religious institutes, and above all in youth ministry.”<sup>10</sup>

In all three the cases, one of the strongest roots is clericalism, with its dualist culture composed of privileges, patriarchalism, silence, and secrecy, about which Pope Francis asserts: “Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”<sup>11</sup>

**For Reflection:** What contribution can my institute make in saying “no” to the different forms of clericalism and “yes” to a more compassionate, generous and mature Church?



## Abuse of power or office

Can. 1389 - §1 “A person who abuses an ecclesiastical power or function is to be punished according to the gravity of the act or omission, not excluding privation of office, unless a law or precept has already established the penalty for this abuse.”

According to the spirit of the Canon law, the elements that characterize an act of **abuse** are:

- acting outside or against the juridical order
- for improper purposes
- or, in any case, against the good of the souls.

The canon speaks of:

***Abuse of ecclesiastical power*** (tied to the order)

***Abuse of office:***

any charge (*munus*)

constituted in stable and objective form as an official charge

of the ecclesiastical organization

for divine or ecclesiastical institutions

with a precise spiritual purpose, that is in the name of the Church (cf. 145 §1).

In the case of religious life, this refers to the office, whose canonical provisions are the act of election and the acceptance of those elected, if it does not require confirmation (can. 146).

The description of the duties-obligations-faculties annexed to the office is contained in the universal right and in the proper right. This disposition intends to protect the office from every form of abuse and arbitrary interpretation.

### ***By fraud***

The fraud—consists in the willful and conscious action of a person-in-charge with the intention of bringing damage to someone.

In the case of fraud, the foreseen punishment is:

- obligatory
- indeterminate, i.e., proportioned to the gravity of the act or the omission
- includes the removal from the office.

### ***Guilty abuse of power or office***

Can. 1389 §2 - “A person who through culpable negligence illegitimately places or omits an act of ecclesiastical power, ministry, or function with harm to another is to be punished with a just penalty.”

The negligence is defined as:

The lack of engagement, attention, interest in the fulfillment of one’s duties.

***Ex-culpa***

- omission of the due action
- voluntary, taking into account can. 1321 § 1, which requires the presence of serious imputability. In fact, there can be no punishment unless it is expressly stipulated in the law
- acts accomplished or omitted illegitimately, i.e., against the law
- with consequent harm to another person.<sup>12</sup>

Can. 1389 turns out to be rather vague because all the violations are potentially crimes, even if—according to can. 1399—it is necessary

to prove:

- the objective gravity
- the scandal
- the true necessity of the punishment.

There remains, in any case, the right to reparation (cann. 128, 57 § 3; 1729 § 1).

**Some examples of potential forms of abuse / prevarication / negligence**

The following is a list of situations, tasks, obligations that Superiors, whether major and not, are required to accomplish according to the text of the CIC. Knowledge of these duties will help one to avoid easy omissions, unconscious manipulation, or punishable violations when we find ourselves in the presence of members who declare that they have been harmed and, therefore, demand that their rights be respected.

***Governance***

- Cann. 609-610: Religious Houses and Their Erection

This must be done in the presence of some requirements, including the written consent of the diocesan bishop, the usefulness of the Church and the institute, the possibility for the members to properly lead the religious life and provide for the own necessities.

- Can. 622: Power of the General Superior and that of Other Superiors

The General Superior holds power over all the provinces, houses, and members of an institute according to proper law, while other superiors possess power within the limits of their function.

- Can. 624: Superiors are elected for a definite and with interruptions in the offices of government.

- Can. 625 § 3: The manners in which Superiors are constituted

In the case of an election, the confirmation of the highest competent Superior is required; in case of appointment, it should be made after consultation.

- Can. 626: Abuses to be avoided in conferring offices

“Superiors in the conferral of offices... are to observe the norms of universal and proper law, are to abstain from any abuse or partiality, and are to appoint or elect those whom they know in the Lord to be truly worthy and suitable, having nothing before their eyes but God and the good of the

institute. Moreover, in elections, they are to avoid any procurement of votes, either directly or indirectly, whether for themselves or for others.” The canon contains an interesting prohibition against lobbying.

- Can. 627: The Council’s role

Superiors are to have their own council and must use its assistance.

- Can. 628: Canonical visits

Superiors whom the proper law of the institute designates for this function are to visit at established times (no more and no less) the houses and the members, according to the norms.

- Can. 629: Punishment is foreseen, including removal from office, for Superiors who do not comply with the obligation of residing in their own house, recalled in can. 1396.

- Can. 630: The members’ freedom of conscience

The members have the right to choose freely a confessor and a director of conscience. Superiors are forbidden to induce the members to make a manifestation of conscience to them. This canon leads us to consider what is said in can. 152, which signals the cases of two or more incompatible offices that cannot be carried out by one and the same person. Within the limits of female religious life, let us reflect on the situation of a superior, major or delegate, who is also responsible for the formation of the junior sisters, whose manifestations of conscience she indeed hears. Or the case specifically indicated in can. 636: the bursar must be distinct from the direct superior.

- Can. 639 § 5: Superiors and debts

Religious superiors are to take care that they do not permit debts to be contracted unless it is certain that the interest on the debt can be paid off within a period that is not too long and without prejudice for the assets of the institute.

### **Formation**

- Cann. 642 and 597 § 2: Admission of an appropriate candidate

The ability of the proposed candidate to assume the institute’s lifestyle can also be assessed by the intervention of an expert, while safeguarding the person’s right to her reputation and privacy, which are protected by can. 220.

- Can. 653: Duration of the novitiate

The novice can freely leave the institute. If judged suitable, she is admitted, otherwise, she is to be dismissed, within six months. In any case, her situation must be definite.

- Cann. 655 and 657: Duration of temporary profession

The minimum duration is set at 3 years, while the maximum is 6 years, with the possibility of prolongation up to 9.

- Cann. 660 and 661: Continuous formation

The members have the right and the duty to continue their spiritual, doctrinal and practical formation, through their entire life. Superiors, moreover, are to provide them with the resources and time for this.

- Can. 670: Obligation to support the members

The institute must supply the members with all those things which are necessary to achieve the purpose of their vocation, according to the norm of the constitutions.

- Cann. 694 - 704: Many canons deal with the duties of the Superior with regard to resignations and, generally, with separation from the institute. I will recall only the general duty to issue without any delay, after the proofs have been collected, a declaration of fact so that the dismissal is established juridically (can. 694 § 2). Likewise, in other situations cited by can. 695 § 1, Superiors can take a different disposition, seeing to it, in any case, that the sister is corrected, justice restored, and the scandal repaired. After this, cann. 696 - 704 proved other procedures of which Superiors must be aware so as not to omit the due acts for the good of each sister, of the community where the events happen, the surrounding environment, and the entire institute.

### ***Apostolate***

- Can. 671: Obligation to obtain permission to assume tasks outside the institute

Religious cannot assume tasks outside the institute, whether in the ecclesial community or outside of it, without the permission of the legitimate superior. This permission must also take into account can. 670, which stipulates the duty of permitting the members to carry out the purpose of their own vocation, in this case, to be able to exercise a service that is a participation of the pastoral *munus* of the Church (can. 676).

- Can. 679: Negligence in acting on the demand of the diocesan bishop

When an extremely grave cause demands it, a diocesan bishop can prohibit a member of a religious institute from residing in the diocese if his or her major superior, after having been informed, has neglected to make provision.

- Can. 683 § 2: Abuses signaled by the bishop in a pastoral visit regarding the apostolic activities

The diocesan bishop can visit the apostolic work carried out by the religious in the diocese. If he discovers abuses, he is obliged to warn the Superior, and if she does not intervene, the bishop can take measures in all those matters in which they are subject to him (cf. can. 1320).

### **Some examples of abuse suffered by religious institutes**

- Can. 681: works entrusted to the religious by the diocesan bishop

In the case of works entrusted by the diocesan bishop to the religious, it is suitable to draw up with the Major Superior an agreement detailing clearly the essential points of the collaboration: the activity to be carried out, the staff that will do the work and the duties as religious, the economic aspects.

- Can. 682: The right to be informed about the removal of a sister  
A diocesan bishop can remove a sister from an office that he himself conferred, but not without informing the religious superior.

## Conclusion

We have tried to explore how the consecrated life is involved in the issue of the exercise of power which is presently burning within the Church and in civil society.

It is not by refusing power that the contradictions it raises will be resolved, especially if our intention when accepting a charge of this kind, is truly only to serve and make the luminous history of our charism's progress. The challenge to be taken up consists rather in receiving these years of service as an opportunity to grow in our personal consciousness, precisely in the lights and the shadows that the role entails.

Let us recall the words of C. Jung:

*"Anyone who perceives his/her shadow and his/her light simultaneously sees him/herself from two sides and thus gets to the core."*

It is at the core that we regain the deepest sense of our following of the Crucified and Risen Christ, who constantly walks with us and teaches us that to serve is to reign.

<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Letter to the People of God* (20 August 2018).

<sup>2</sup> An internationally known author, maker and coach on themes concerning leadership based on Vision-Values-strategies.

<sup>3</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 35: "we must think of human society as being primarily a spiritual reality. By its means enlightened men can share their knowledge of the truth, can claim their rights and fulfill their duties, receive encouragement in their aspirations for the goods of the spirit, share their enjoyment of all the wholesome pleasures of the world, and strive continually to pass on to others all that is best in themselves and to make their own the spiritual riches of others."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> P. Gherri, *L'autotutela AMMINISTRATIVA COME SUPPLEMENTO DI CONOSCENZA: LA Remonstratio canonica* (cann. 1732-1734 CIC), in: P. Gherri (ed.),

*Decidere e giudicare nella Chiesa. Atti della VI giornata canonistica interdisciplinare*, Vatican City, 2012, p. 317.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. The article: "Potere, genealogia del," in: N. Abbagnano, *Dizionario di filosofia*, Novara, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Article "Abuso," in: *Enciclopedia Treccani*.

<sup>10</sup> A.O.P. Candiard, Reflexion to the general meeting of the Conference of the religious ones and of the religious of France (Corref), ( Lourdes, 10-13 November 2018), in: *Service d'information religieuse*, Wednesday, 14 November 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Francis, *Letter to the People of God*.

<sup>12</sup> The specification is of fundamental importance, in all that carries the attention not only on the formal technical defects of the act (which the nonexistence, the nullity, the invalidity, the rescindability, the ineffectiveness) but above all on the subject whose existence is involved which addressee and at the same time which subject co-operator. Cf. P. Gherri, *L'autotutela*, p. 325.

# TO ONE WHO EXERCISES POWER, JESUS SAYS...

Sr. Elisabetta Flick, SA

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*Original in Italian*

The text *New Wine in New Wineskins* reminds us that “the evangelic originality (Mk 10:43), of which the consecrated life is meant to be the living prophecy comes from practical aptitudes and choices: the primacy of service (Mk 10:43–45) and the steady journey towards the poor and solidarity with the least among us (Lk 9:48), the promotion of the dignity of the person in whatever situation they find themselves living and suffering (Mt 25:40); subsidiarity as an exercise of reciprocal trust and of generous collaboration of all and with all.”<sup>1</sup>

At the meeting in 2017, we already dealt with the theme of the skills and choices that constitute “the evangelic originality of which the consecrated life is meant to be the living prophecy” starting from the perspective of the practices of government, particularly in reference to joint responsibility and solidarity. At today’s meeting, we are going to take the same theme up again, with reference to the exercise of the power that, as we have seen this morning, requires great human and spiritual vigilance in order not to succumb to the often insidious temptations that we are reminded about in the *Guidelines*, in part two: “Ongoing Challenges,” on *Service of authority* and *Relational models*<sup>2</sup>.

To help us to enter into this vigilance, in daily life, I propose that we let ourselves be guided by the word that Jesus addresses to the Twelve who,

scandalized by the question of Zebedee's sons (Mt and Mk), are quarreling about who is the greatest (Lk): *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mt 20:25–28; also cf. Mk 10:42–45 and Lk 22:25–27).

Jesus addresses these words to them precisely after the third announcement of his passion and shortly before his entry into Jerusalem, in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, after the foretelling of Juda's betrayal and Peter's denial; the Gospel of Luke, using different terms, places these words at the end of Jesus' public life, when he is on his way to the accomplishment of the final act of exercise of the power that he has received from the Father<sup>3</sup>: *to give his life a ransom for many*.

We can rightly be amazed that, at such a crucial moment, the disciples are only concerned about who is the greatest! And we can also perceive the distance between, on the one hand, wanting to follow Jesus of Nazareth and to share his mission and, on the other, to accept to adopt the way that Jesus has chosen to carry it out. The episode reminds us that, like Jesus' first companions who have shared his public life and journeyed with him, we must still and always to learn to occupy the right position when we are called to an office of government and, hence, to exercise the power that has been conferred on us.

Jesus' answer to the Twelve is clear: exercising power means becoming the servant of all and, therefore, to give one's life.

Moreover, it is necessary to learn to exercise power truly as a service, with the awareness that the Gospels do not supply predefined methods. Simply, they show, step by step, Jesus' attitudes and fundamental choices that represent the different guidelines for exercising our office of governance.

I invite you now to reflect on two activities that constitute the essentials of Jesus' public life and that the synoptic Gospels identify as the fields in which He exercises his power, a power that He confers on his disciples at the outset of his public life<sup>4</sup>:

- the power to cast out demons;
- the power to cure the sick;

## 1. The power to cast out demons

The Synoptic Gospels, as we know, begin the account of Jesus' public life with his Baptism, during which God refers to him as his beloved Son<sup>5</sup>; now, this narrative is immediately followed by the temptation in the desert<sup>6</sup>, a scene in which Jesus fights against the Tempter. This opposition has to do with the way in which power should be exercised by God's Son, so that he may be recognized for who he is.

*“If you are the Son of God...”* says the Tempter, then you can use your power to immediately satisfy all your wishes and take possession of all the kingdoms of the earth, if you follow the way that I show you, or rather if you submit to my power. The refusal that Jesus opposes against the Tempter in the desert—the refusal to exercise his power for his own interest—is the same that he will oppose, throughout his life, against all the temptations along his path. He must resist against the crowd’s desire to make him king (cf. Jn 6:14–15),<sup>7</sup> against the disciples’ hope of seeing him deliver Israel, or rather overthrowing the occupying power and restoring the kingdom of Israel (cf. Lk 24:21)<sup>8</sup>. They nourished this hope, formulated by the disciples of Emmaus after his death, all throughout his public life and prevented them from recognizing Jesus’ Passion and death as ways of accomplishment; this was a stumbling-block on his path, as the episode immediately following Peter’s profession of faith at Caesarea shows<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, this profession, is directly followed by the first announcement of the passion, to which Peter replicates with a categorical refusal: *“he took him aside and began to rebuke him”* and, then, the equally categorical refusal of Jesus, who reveals the Tempter’s work in Peter: *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.”* Even on the cross, where the Tempter’s figure looms behind the crowd and the religious leaders, Jesus must continue choosing not to exercise his power for his benefit: *“Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him’”* (Mt 27:39–42; also cf. Mt 15:29–32).

The fact that Jesus’ public life begins and ends with temptations related to how he exercises his power as God’s Son resounds like a constant call and invitation to recognize that, whenever power is exercised, there is always the temptation and the possibility of power abuse, which is always, in one way or another, the use of power for one’s own advantage. Now, one just has to open a newspaper and study a bit of history to see that, truly, in several countries, *“the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.”* We must recognize that, unfortunately, in the Church and in religious life too, there is real abuse of power; and this fact underscores the importance of daring to look straight at the temptations alive within us and being able to reject them, or rather exercising the power that Jesus gives to his disciples to cast out demons.

The *“Ongoing Challenges”*, dealt with in part two of the *Guidelines*,<sup>10</sup> could also be read as the temptations that we must resist if we are to avoid abuse of power. Now, it would undoubtedly be fruitful to take the time to reread these pages, while daring to face, with courage and humbleness, the temptations alive in us, those to which we have perhaps sometimes given in while exercising the power that has been entrusted to us. This is not intended to provoke desolation, to make us feel guilty, or to discourage us (that would be a new temptation), but



rather to make us reject them, with the help of God and of our brothers and sisters.

I limit myself, here, to briefly recalling the risks of abuse of power related to the basis of our choice in life to follow Christ in a Congregation—a choice of life characterized by the vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity.

Paragraph 20 of the *Guidelines*, evoking some institutes founded recently, evokes “*episodes and situations of manipulation of the freedom and dignity of people. Not only reducing them to a total dependence that mortified their dignity, and sometimes even their fundamental human rights, but sometimes even leading them, with various means of deception and the pretense of loyalty to God’s plans through charism, to a form of submission even in the realms of morality and sexual intimacy. With great scandal for all when the facts are brought to light.*”<sup>11</sup> No one who exercises power—be it at the local, provincial, or general level—is protected against the temptation of manipulating to get what he/she wants.

- **Regarding the vow of obedience:** Normally, in the religious life, making the vow of obedience means agreeing freely to listen together to the Spirit, in order to discern how we can accomplish our desire to give our lives as we follow Christ. This listening “together” implies that those who exercise some form of power have agreed, just like the other members of the congregation, to practice this obedient listening proper of each of the members.

Abuse of power is never far, when, by negligence, for fear of disagreement or loss of authority, or feeling sure of being right, the person exercising power is satisfied with informing of the decisions that he/she has taken, or worse gives the order to do this or that without taking the necessary time for a dialogue and “listening” in depth. There may, more subtly, be only an apparent dialogue, to give the impression that one is listening in depth, but the aim is, in fact, to show the other person that the only road open is the one that I have already decided to follow. This kind of demonstration can take the form of spiritual and emotional manipulation (calling the readiness, claim that “God’s will” is known beforehand by the one exercising the power, who considers himself/herself to be its sole authentic interpreter...), both of which are abuses of power.

The *Guidelines* warn us of the fact that “*those who exercise their ministry without the patience of listening and the acceptance of understanding give themselves little authoritativeness among their brothers and sisters. Indeed ‘authority of the religious superior must be characterized by the spirit of service, in imitation of Christ who came not to be served but to serve’.*”<sup>12</sup>

Now, Jesus’ way of serving is characterized by the total respect of the other’s freedom.

Many episodes in the Gospels attest that this freedom to choose, to decide and to assume one’s responsibilities left by Jesus to the people he meets. Let us recall his encounters with the Samaritan woman, the adulterous, the

healing of the man born blind, in the Gospel according to St. John (4:1–42; 8:1–11; 9:1–41), as well as the narrative of his meeting with the rich young man (Mt 19:16–22; Mk 10:17–22; Lk 18:18–23) that tells us that Jesus loved him but lets him leave, respecting his freedom of choice, although this choice makes him “really sad.”

In the light of these Gospel narratives and what the *Guidelines* say, it might be interesting to see how, in our recent decisions, we have practiced obedient listening and respected the freedom of those concerned and how the people involved have practiced this obedient listening and respected our freedom.

- **Regarding the vow of poverty:** Here, too, as for the vow of obedience, in religious life, vowing poverty means freely consenting to share all our resources. This common sharing of resources not only concerns material belongings but also spiritual, cultural, intellectual, manual, relational resources, and so on. We know well that these resources constitute a particularly sensitive place in the exercise of power and that true “putting in common” is never acquired once and for all. There is, indeed, always present a risk of transforming this putting “everything in common”, which is a sign of sharing and of communion (cf. Acts 2:42–47<sup>13</sup>), into a dependence that does not respect the dignity of the persons and even less their freedom. It is not so sure that in our congregations and, in them, within each of our communities, “the distribution of goods in communities [is] always done with respect for justice and corresponsibility,”<sup>14</sup> as the *Guidelines* ask it to be, while warning of the fact that “in some cases there is almost a regime that betrays the essential foundations of fraternal life, while ‘persons in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person.’ We cannot accept a management style in which the economic autonomy of a few corresponds to the dependence of others, thereby undermining the sense of reciprocal belonging and the guarantee of fairness, even in the recognition of differences of role and service.”<sup>15</sup>

If this point of attention is directed to the economic dimension as a place where the risks of abuse of power are important—especially by superiors and bursars—, it must be known that all the resources jealously kept by those who receive them can be used for exerting domination over others and making them dependent.<sup>16</sup>

Here, it might also be interesting to see if and how, in the exercise of our power, we are really serving the “putting in common” of all our resources.

- **Regarding the vow of celibacy:** In the case of the vows of obedience and poverty, in religious life the vow of celibacy means freely consenting to make the Congregation the family in which we are invited to build sisterly/brotherly relationships. The building these relations, just like all other human and humanizing relations, is characterized by chastity, i.e., the respect of each person’s inalienable freedom. The painful revelations that the Church

is witnessing today show to what extent abuse of power seriously puts into question the vow of celibacy and chastity of the relations, and not only on the sexual level. As no. 20 of the *Guidelines*—already quoted above—notes, the chastity of relations is largely put into question, both in community life and in the mission, by practices of “*manipulation of the freedom and dignity of people*” that progressively lead to “*a total dependence that mortified their dignity, and sometimes even their fundamental human rights, but sometimes even leading them, with various means of deception and the pretense of loyalty to God’s plans through charism, to a form of submission even in the realms of morality and sexual intimacy.*”<sup>17</sup>

More than never, in the present context, we are invited to be vigilant in order to see if and how our way of exercising power serves the construction of humanizing sisterly/brotherly relations that respect each person’s dignity and freedom.

I have allowed myself to recall these risks of abuse of power that—I imagine—each one of us has experienced at one moment or another in religious life and of which we still bear the scars of the wounds that it has caused; this is of course not intended to discourage us and/or to make us feel guilty but simply to help us to find our just place, while daring to face the temptations that live within us and remember that Jesus faced them before us and has given us the power to reject them. Following him, and with him, we have received the power to expel demons, learning, day after day, through our successes and our failures, to accomplish our task of government as a service for the benefit of all (the common good) and of each (the common good). When doing this, with God’s grace, we will modestly respond to the pressing appeal that Pope Francis addresses to “*communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another.*”<sup>18</sup>

## 2. The power to heal the sick

When Jesus sends the Twelve on their mission, in the Gospel according to Matthew he says: “*As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment*” (Mt 10:7–8).

And in response to John the Baptist’s question about his identity: “*Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?*” Jesus says: “*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them*” (Mt 11:2–5).

If we read the Gospels from beginning to end, we might notice, on the one hand, that there are many narratives about healing and the expulsion of demons; and, on the other hand, that the majority of cures described are those of people

who are blind, paralytic, deaf and dumb, or struck by leprosy<sup>19</sup>.

Like the first disciples, we have received the mission to bring healing, which is one of the visible marks that God's Kingdom is near, and this mission is an integral part of the task of governance that is entrusted to us. Obviously, we do not have the power to cure the physically ill, but we could, by listening to these accounts, feel the invitation to cure and heal what, in us and in others, is blind, paralyzed, deaf, dumb, and struck by leprosy.

To what attitudes do these healing narratives invite us in the exercise of power as a service? These attitudes are not very different from those that I evoked in 2017 with reference to an evangelic practice of government, although I will now express them a bit differently:

- ***Become the other's neighbor:*** In most of the healing narratives, Jesus is on his way and lets himself be approached by the sick person, whether he comes alone to meet him, or others bring the person to him<sup>20</sup>. And he lets himself be approached by those suffering from leprosy, to the point of touching them and letting himself be touched, thus becoming impure and obliged, like these lepers, to stay outside the city<sup>21</sup>.

If we want to heal and be healed, there is no other way than accepting to approach one another, unconditionally. Nobody can be left on the roadside, deprived of attention and care. Now, we might ask ourselves which members of our congregations we risk excluding from our attention and care, because they are paralyzed in their certitude, in the habits and/or the reputation that has been attributed to them... or because they have been blinded by their convictions, their prejudices..., or because they cannot express their opinion and/or listen to that of others. Henceforth, instead of leaving them sitting on the roadside, we must search together for ways to help them to start moving again.

- ***Helping each one to express his/her wish to be healed:*** We might be surprised to hear Jesus say to the blind who are asking for his pity: "*What do you want me to do for you?*" (Mt 20:32), because the answer seems evident to us. Beyond this astonishment, we can try to listen to the invitation addressed to us and summarize it in this way: Do not think that you know better than these people themselves what they deeply want, what they are suffering from, what needs care and healing in them.

In other words, we take the time to speak with one another and to listen to one another in order to find together the remedies to the illnesses that are consuming us. Let's take the time to allow, in dialogue and prayer, the revelation of the obstacles that hinder us, personally, in community, in province, in the Congregation, in forming the "sisterly" and brotherly communion between us, *that becomes attractive and bright*<sup>22</sup>: the paralyses that hold us back (fears, suspicions, lack of confidence in oneself and in others): the blindness that prevents us from seeing (staying locked up in

“our little world,” intangible convictions, prejudices...); the deafness and/or the mutism that prevent us from entering together into this true and deep loving relation that is the characterizing mark of Christ’s disciples: “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:35), a true and profound relation of love that finds its full expression in the gesture of the foot washing that took place shortly before Jesus pronounced these words.

- ***Not creating dependence:*** The respect for the freedom, about which we have already talked in the first part, also has its place in healing narratives. As soon as Jesus has healed someone, he lets him go without demanding anything—if not the discretion, which is not always respected—and the reminder that thanks and recognition must be given to God<sup>23</sup>.

Unlike certain doctors who are tempted to make decisions in the place of their patients, let us take the time to feel and listen to the Gospel’s appeal to not make those of whom we have the mission to care for dependent on us.

This requires great work on oneself and with others. It is, in fact, a question of *giving freely* what we have *received freely*, without waiting for anything in return, and thus running the risk of seeming “inane” in the eyes of others, like Jesus of Nazareth, who gave himself so entirely to those who came to find or meet him on the road that “*his family went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind’*” (Mk 3:20–21). Let us remember that, while wanting to exercise power as a service as Jesus did is madness, “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:25).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to evoke the third activity carried out by Jesus of Nazareth during his public life: the proclamation of the arrival of God’s Kingdom (cf. Mt 10:7) or, in other words, announcing the Good News to the poor (cf. Mt 11:5). This activity, of which the power to cast out demons and healing is the concrete manifestation, is the foundation of his life and of his mission, as He says himself, making the text of Isaiah his own:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”* and he adds: “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*” (Lk 4:18–19.21).

Jesus’ entire life can be summarized in this unique proclamation, in the words and gestures that bear witness to the unconditional love of God, his Father and our Father, for each one of us, since the origins and through all Eternity.

This is also the mission that he entrusted to his first disciples at the beginning

of his public life and then again after his Resurrection:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... And, I am with you every day, to the end of the age”* (Mt 28:18–20; also cf. Mk 16:15; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8).

Although the Twelve are sent with this mission, let us not forget that the Risen Christ gave the first mission to the women, who were his companions on the road and have never abandoned him. They were the first to whom Jesus appeared and, so, they became the first sent with the mission of announcing the Good News of the Resurrection.

Through Baptism, all of us have received—after them, the twelve, and the first disciples—the same mission and the power to accomplish it, with the assurance that Christ will be at our side *“every day until the end of time,”* including in the moments of doubt and discouragement that we share with the first disciples, as the Gospel accounts of their missionary mandate attest.

In the moments, when we have the impression that the entrusted mission cannot be accomplished or that the load is becoming too heavy to bear, we can turn to Christ and hear him say to us:

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Mt 11:28–30).

<sup>1</sup> CIVCSVA, *New Wine in New Wineskins, Guidelines*, LEV, 2017, 31, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–28, pp. 47–61.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jn 5:19ff.: *“Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing.”*

<sup>4</sup> *“Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness”* (Mt 10:1); *“he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out*

*demons”* (Mk 3:14–15); *“Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal”* (Lk 9:1–2).

<sup>5</sup> *“And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”* (Mt 3:17); *“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’”* (Mk 1:11); *“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’”* (Lk 3:22).

<sup>6</sup> Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–13.

<sup>7</sup> Jn 6:14-15: "When the people saw the sign that he had done (the multiplication of the loaves) they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

<sup>8</sup> Lk 24:21: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

<sup>9</sup> Mt 16:22-23; Mk 8:31-33.

<sup>10</sup> CIVCSVA, *New Wine in New Wineskins, Guidelines*, nos. 11-28, pp. 33-61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 20, pp. 49-50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 21, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 2:42-45: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers [...] All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need."

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 27, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 27, p. 59-60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 40, p. 75: "Be vigilant so that the gap between the consecrated women who serve in authority (at all levels) or who are tasked with the administration of goods (at all levels) and the sisters who depend on them doesn't become a source of suffering from disparity and authoritarianism. This happens when the former develop maturity and projectuality while the later are deprived of even the most basic forms of decision making and development of personal and community resources."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, n°20, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 99; quoted in *New Wine in New Wineskins*, no. 24, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Stories about the healing of the leper: Mt 8:1-4 (cf. also Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16; Lk

17:11-19).

Story about the healing of the paralytic one: Mt 9:1-8 (cf. also Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26); Mt 12:9-14 (cf. also Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11).

Stories about the healing of the blind: Mt 9:27-31; Mt 20:29-34; Mk 8:22-28; Mk 10:46-52 (cf. also Lk 18:35-43).

Stories about recovery of deaf persons and / or of dumb ones: Mt 9, 32-34 et 12, 22-24 (cf. also Lk 11,14-15); Mk 7, 31-37.

<sup>20</sup> "When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and there was a leper who came..." (Mt 8:1-2); "And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town. And just then some people brought a paralyzed man to him..." (Mt 9:1-2); "As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!'" (Mt 9:27-28); "After they had gone away, a demoniac was brought to him..." (Mt 9:32); "As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!'" (Mt 20:29-30).

<sup>21</sup> "Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter" (Mk 1:45).

<sup>22</sup> For example, Francis, Ap. *Gospels gaudium* (24 November 2013), 99; quoted in *New Wine in new wineskins*, n°24, p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> "Then Jesus said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" (Mt 8:4; also cf. Mk 1:44 and Lk 5:14); "But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word" (Mk 1:45); "Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it" (Mk 7:36).





# PRAYER AT THE HEART OF THE CHAPTER

Fr. David Glenday, MCCJ

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*These reflections were addressed by Father David Glenday to the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate (PIME) during the day of prayer in preparation of their XI General Chapter (Nemi, 06/09/2018).*

*Original in English*

## First reflection

I want to begin by reading a text from the Gospels that you might stay with during the day. The prologue from the gospel of St John (1). “In the beginning was the Word... The Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory... Full of grace and truth ...It is God who has made him known”. Indeed, you too are at the prologue of your General Chapter!

At the heart of what I would like to share with you today is an encouragement and it is this encouragement: to live the Chapter as *a gift of prayer*. To live prayer as the very heart of the Chapter, not merely as a very essential preparation, nor merely as a very essential accompaniment but prayer as the place where our Chapters are born, from where they are generated, where the decisions and orientations of the Chapter are conceived. Prayer as the place where the Chapter finds its courage, hope, strength imagination, creativity. Prayer as the place to which the Chapter will lead our missionary family. Prayer as the destination. Will our missionary family be a more prayerful family as a consequence of our Chapter? Will we as family be more contagious of prayer, more capable of setting people alight? A question that you might like to take regarding prayer could be: How might this Chapter be a grace of prayer for me? I have been called to the Chapter. In what way does this mean I have been called to prayer? Perhaps, too, in prayer you might review your journey since you knew you were coming to the Chapter: What difference has the Chapter made, enriched, challenged your prayer life? As a little possible help in considering the gift of prayer that is given to us during a Chapter, I'd like to briefly and very simply ask and answer with you three questions: the how, the what and the where of the gift of prayer in the Chapter.



## ***The how***

How might I pray when I pray the Chapter? As a start, I recommend Phil 2:13 where Paul says very simply, *God is at work in you! Our prayer, in the first place, is God at work in us.* The invitation, the initiative, the call, the attraction, the persistence is His. At this time, in your life, and in the Chapter how are you recognising God at work in you? God the gardener, God the builder, God the potter, God the architect. I think this conviction, this faith that God is at work in me may generate some beautiful things in our prayer.

*Firstly, peace, serenity.* In the first place, prayer is His (God's) work. Prayer is what God is doing. Also in the Chapter, God is at work! So, to begin the Chapter with this conviction, truth, experience that says "trust, be at peace.... since the Lord is involved. The Lord loves your missionary family, appreciates your family, is keeping your family alive. Trust His action. God is at work in you 'giving the will and the action'.

*A second fruit of God being at work in us is that of attentiveness.* Attentiveness is a condition, a way of being. To be attentive, to pay attention. We should ask ourselves: Lord, what are you doing? Attentiveness often needs some silence, external and internal.

*A third attitude, which may be generated by the work of God in us, is Mission.* Mission is born of prayer. 'Apart from me, you can do nothing!' God is at work in us. When we are attentive to Him, we will find that we are involved in work too. The God we meet in prayer is a working God. It will be natural if our prayer disposes us, convinces us to work with and to see mission as a fabulous privilege. God, the Creator of the universe asks me to be his co-worker!! We can never be too surprised by this. *So "the how" to pray the Chapter involves a deep peace, attentiveness and an availability for mission.*

## ***The what***

We have the whole day to find the answer to these questions. Here is mine. We pray in the Chapter that the Gospel may happen here. There is a phrase in Spe Salvi (2) which states: *The Gospel is not only informative but performative... that means the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known, it is one that makes things happen and is life changing.* The Gospel makes things happen and is life changing. To want to pray the Chapter means we want to hear the Gospel here and now in such a way that something happens – thanks to the Gospel - and our lives are changed. In other words, the Chapter can be a Gospel event. We pray that the Gospel happens here and now. I want to mention three verbs: 1. *Let the Chapter celebrate the Gospel!* Savour the lives of our sisters. We are called to live the phase of the reports with grateful hearts. Celebrate the beauty of your Charism. Contemplate the fruits of the Spirit in yourselves. Let there be much gratitude in your prayer, maybe an unexpected gratitude. The Spirit can lead us to remember even things that we have forgotten or have wanted to forget. A good Chapter, like all good decisions, will be born of gratitude. Let us mention

Ignatius Loyola at least once: *good decisions are born of consolation, of an awareness that there is something very real to celebrate. Celebrate and Listen.* What is the Spirit speaking to the Congregation? The first privilege that a Chapter has is to proclaim the Gospel to the Congregation. It is almost inevitable that listening during the Chapter will have its painful moments. However, it is the pain of growth. Even our ears and hearts may suffer some growing pain. The Holy Spirit generally is not inclined to shout. The Holy Spirit seems to prefer to speak quietly. So listening is important. Thirdly, witnessing: we are called to become, to be transformed. Quoting Pope Francis, '*I am a Mission*' in this world (EG 273). It is what we are that matters. Let the Gospel happen. What Gospel does the Lord wish me to be? Here it is appropriate to sound the note of hope for the grace of God: the past history is never a prison, is never a chain, never an absolute conditioning. It might be good to remember Jeremiah (29:11): '*I know the plans I have for you .... Plans of goodness and prosperity. I will give you a future and a hope*'. These are words written when the people were in exile. If we pray the Chapter, how will we pray, what will we pray and where might we find ourselves praying?

### ***The Where***

At this point, I recommend that you pray John 1. John 1 is saying that if you want this grace, look for it here, expect it here. What is this here? Let me mention two 'here': *the flesh* and the "*all*" .

'*The Word became flesh*'(1:14). What a blessing it is to be weak! French Jesuit, Michel de Certeau spoke about how 'temptations are a privilege of the chosen people'. The kind of prayer that we are talking about here is the kind of prayer that says we are weak. Maybe weakness is the place where the Lord is waiting for us. Do not get irritated when you discover your limits. This morning, we read the Gospel of the Samaritan woman. St Augustine, on preaching this passage asked the question, '*Why did Jesus wait for the woman by a well?*' He waited for her by a well because a well is a big black hole. When we fall into the biggest black hole, He will be there. Jesus was tired...

Another meeting place that John emphasises in the prologue is "*all*". Check how many times the word 'all' is cited in the prologue. What will be the "*all*" of our Chapters? Here I am talking about opening our hearts. We are talking about a global vision. How this '*all*' will be present in our missionary options? How to allow the missionary situations to speak to us? How to allow our Charism Ad Gentes to grow? *Flesh, all and grace*. Grace and growth. '*Of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace*'. Maybe praying the Chapter will mean recognising key points of growth in grace, that the Chapters will want to share with the sisters. Maybe it will mean taking to heart the growth of each sister, believing in the possibility of that growth. The charism is grace. If it is grace, it grows. The Chapter is to allow the Charism to grow, to develop. It is also important to believe that the Chapter will be a personal growth for me too!

Let me conclude with the last few lines of EG 11: *“As Saint Ireneaus writes, by his coming Christ brought with him all newness. With this newness, he is always able to renew our lives and our communities. Even if the Christian message has known period of darkness and weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus is always able to break through the dull categories that we use to imprison him... When we make an effort to return to the source, new avenues arrive...”*

## Second reflection

I hope that the morning time has allowed you somehow to be led into the prayer that the Lord had in store for you. I hope that what I share now will accompany what has been said. This day of silence is a well from which we will need to draw. This is a precious time for our Chapter. I want to begin by reading the Gospel I proposed for your reflection and prayer, John 4:43-54.

At that time Jesus left Samaria for Galilee. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his native place. When he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves had gone to the feast. Then he returned to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, who was near death. Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” The royal official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “You may go; your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and left. While the man was on his way back, his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live. He asked them when he began to recover. They told him, “The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon.” The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live,” and he and his whole household came to believe. Now this was the second sign Jesus did when he came to Galilee from Judea.

We can see in this Gospel, the grace of an *encounter*. We can also speak in this way of a General Chapter! In the first place, an encounter with the Lord: We know that we can find the Lord here and we also wish to encounter him on behalf of our Sisters.

Maybe we can enter into conversation with the Royal Official (John 4:43ff) and ask him: Dear Royal Official, what did it mean for you to meet Jesus? What happened in your life? Maybe the first thing that he might share with us is *‘when I met Jesus, I met a man on the move’*. I suggest you reread the gospel and notice how many verbs of movement there are there. Judea, Samaria, Galilee, A man on the move. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is a missionary. An authentic encounter with Jesus is an encounter with a missionary. In our prayer, we can ask ourselves: *in my life what has it meant to meet Jesus, the man on the move, the man on the journey?* It is very obvious that Jesus the man on the move is carrying a highly

infectious virus, that once we begin to interact with this man on the move we find that we are also on the move as we could see in the account of the Samaritan woman, the Samaritans themselves, the disciples themselves, though a little late. All of us here have been thus ‘infected’, otherwise we would not be here. How much we are able to infect others of faith? It is about generating missionary witness. We are a varied group, and we are the icon of what it happens to meet the man Jesus, the man on the move. We could pray this with a sense of gratitude, but also saying perhaps a little fearfully, ‘Jesus, how do you want us to move?’ That you want us to move is not to be discussed. That’s for sure! It is seldom that we will find a passage where Jesus tells people to just stay where they are. There is a beautiful version in this text, verse 50b: *‘the man believed in the word Jesus had said to him and went on his journey’*. Wouldn’t it be great if our Chapters were able to say: ‘This is the Word that we have heard, we have believed in and this is the journey upon which the Word has set us’. It would be also wonderful if each of us could say this. This is the Word that I have trusted and this is the journey upon which it has set me.

If we continue in conversation with the Official, and we say, ‘So, you set out on this journey. Why?’ “The gospel tells us that it was because he let the flesh be a word to him. *In the flesh of Jesus he heard a word that allowed him to trust. It seems to me that this will be a very important part of the Chapter journey. In the flesh, in reality, in events, in history, in the poor, in the peoples we work with to perceive a word, which sets us on a journey.* What is the word that Jesus is speaking to me? This is awfully important because it is the source of energy. Let Life give me life, let me live in such a way that it gives me life. We are not living on the moon, nor in heaven, but you know what I mean. That is what the Official did. Another beautiful thing about his experience, which scholars point out to us is this: When John refers to this man, on each occasion it is with a more human title. You can check this later. The first time he is called *a Royal Official*. He has a role. The second time he is referred to as *the man (the human being)*. The third time, he is referred to as *the father. Basiliskos, anthropos, pater*. His journey makes him more human and it is interesting looking at some of the preparatory material of various Chapters that there is a hunger for this among religious. We are religious in order to become human. It is not the other way around. In Joseph Ratzinger’s book, ‘Introduction to Christianity’, there comes a point when he says, “*well now we’ve explained all this about Christianity, if somebody was to ask what was the point of being a Christian? He would say it is to become human.*

So maybe our Chapters can listen for this thirst, for this desire for humanity, that our way of living may lead us with all our limitations to be more human. This is a very brief way of speaking about something that could be spoken about in more depth. I am inviting you to see the man’s journey, even before he got the news. It is a very human story.

Two more things to mention. The fact that faith is contagious. The man reaches home and the whole household believes.

Finally, in John ‘faith’ is mentioned 98/99 times but never using a substantive. You always hear it in verb form, i.e. believe. Believe in (movement), believe that (trust), believe with a full stop. Unconditional belief. Let me conclude with a little of my personal story (and then with a paragraph from EG).

The story is about my dad. You heard I was born in India, thanks be to God. My mum and dad met on a ship. Dad was Scottish (Presbyterian) and mum was Irish (110% Catholic). Dad was very understanding. They married in Bombay Cathedral. When dad retired from the sea (merchant navy) he used to go to mass every Sunday with mum. So we were hoping that one day he might become a catholic. Then the day of my ordination to the diaconate, I gave my parents a bible but I thought it would be an ornament in the house. On the contrary, every time I went home I found the bible next to my Father’s armchair. This was five years before his decision to be received in the Catholic Church. The word sends us on a journey. Having come to the conclusion that dad would never enter the Church and that that was okay, one month before I left for Uganda (my first mission) I concelebrated in the mass during which my dad aged 71 received conditional baptism, confession, first communion and confirmation. Think of your own stories, of how you have been and are the Royal Official. Think of all the Royal Officials, whom you know.

I would like to finish now with the famous EG 49, which is all about journey:

*“Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church, which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church, which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: ‘Give them something to eat’ (Mk 6:37)”.*

Let us ask that this Chapter may be the place in which the Word sets us on a journey. This man, this Chapter believed in the Word and set on a journey.

## From the Desk of the Executive Secretary

These past months have seen many significant developments for women's religious life both here at UISG and elsewhere. The *XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* which took place from October 3-28 was an important moment in the life of the Church. Three sisters attended as representatives of UISG. Sr. Sally Hodgdon, CSJ (Vice President of UISG); Sr. Lucy Muthoni Nderi, FMA (Kenya) and Sr. Mina Kwon, SPC (Korea) joined several other sisters who were present as auditors or experts. They addressed the theme of the Synod "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" from their experience and in the light of their various roles and ministries. They made a significant contribution through individual interventions and in the group discussions. After the Synod they participated in a webinar at UISG to share their experience widely. That webinar can still be accessed through the following link: <http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org/synod2018-listening-religious-sisters-synod-youth/>

During the period September-October 2018 on-line interviews were conducted with sisters who had applied to join the *2019 UISG Course for those being prepared as formators*. At the end of this interview process 33 sisters were offered a place on the course which began during the first week of February 2019 and will conclude at the end of June. The sisters come from different many nationalities and are settling in happily to life at UISG and here in Rome. Sr. Cynthia Reyes SRA from the Philippines is the Coordinator of the programme. The morning sessions are held at UISG where various themes and topics are covered on a weekly basis. The afternoons are spent at the Pontifical University of the Angelicum where, at the Mater Ecclesiae Institute, the sisters attend four courses designed for future formators with other religious women and men. This course will be held again in 2020 during the same period and applications will be invited shortly.

UISG has continued to offer various opportunities for *ongoing formation* which have occurred both on-site but also on-line as we seek to reach out to all our members and their congregations worldwide. These have covered areas such as child protection, interculturality, general chapters and discernment processes, reconfiguration, migration and the challenges for the Christian community, the digital world, *Laudato Si': Sowing Hope for the Planet*. Formation opportunities are offered in several languages and this enables good conversations to take place, listening to each other's experience from different parts of the world, across the languages. What is particularly pleasing is to see groups and even whole communities following the sessions. Time and space have certainly been compressed and we are beginning to have a sense of being one large family of women religious, united in mind and heart, serving the needs of today.

During the months of October and November, *the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation* held several meeting with sisters, together with various organizations who support the work of Sisters in the US, Africa and globally. These gatherings which were held in Long Beach (California), Accra (Ghana) and in Kampala (Uganda) were led by Sr. Jane Wakahui LSOSF the Director of the Catholic Sisters Programs. The Executive Secretary of UISG was present at all three gatherings. While these meetings focused on explaining the new 2018-2022 Catholic Sisters Strategic Initiative developed by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, they also provided important opportunities to meet with the Sisters and hear about their life and ministries in East, West and Central Africa. There were important practical sessions on monitoring, evaluation and learning, data and information systems and identifying key indicators of progress. In addition two panel presentations focused on *Catholic Sisters and their Ministries* and *Fostering Partnerships for Social Change*.

The Executive Secretary addressed a series of meetings and conferences during these past months which included a meeting of Religious in the Nottingham Diocese; a Conference to celebrate the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope Francis at Regis University (Denver) and the FADICA Meeting (Rome). Other members of the UISG staff, especially Sr. Elisabetta Flick SA, the Associate Executive Secretary, have responded to requests to speak on different aspects of religious life and ministry. The opportunity to connect with different groups and to hold important conversations on faith and witness today, was stressed in the UISG Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

In the last Bulletin the preparation for the January 2019 *Interculturality Seminar* had begun. This was a major event with 178 participants (45 congregational groups), translation in four different languages, all working together in two connected halls at UISG. We now have the capacity, thanks to the generosity of several US congregations, to stream with translation between these two halls. It was quite amazing to see the technology in action because this was the first time that we had experienced the optimum use of our new technological capacity. It didn't matter whether the presenter or the questioner was in the upper or lower hall, each speaker could be seen and heard with translation provided in the different languages. We are very fortunate to have both Sr. Florence de la Villeon RSCJ, who trained as an engineer and Ms. Patrizia Morgante, the UISG Communication Officer to help expand the use of this new communication capacity.

Finally preparation are well under way for the Special Meeting on "*the protection of minors in the Church*" which will take place in the Vatican from 21 to 24 February 2019. The members of the Executive Board of UISG and the Executive Secretary will attend. The next issue of the Bulletin will report on the outcome of the meeting and the steps which the UISG will undertake as a result. May the Holy Spirit guide the Church during these important deliberations.



## MIGRANTS PROJECT IN SICILY

### Do you want to leave too?

**“Do you want to leave too? ...”** this is how the dialogue between Cardinal Montenegro and the community in Agrigento began at the meeting intended to inform him about the service rendered by the sisters and to search with him for the paths to follow, given the situation of migrants after the latest immigration laws.

We have started the second three-year period; some sisters have finished their first term, and others arrived in September to gradually become part of the community and the requested service.

People are very grateful to the “pioneer” sisters who, with courage and hard work, began the service in Sicily, building networks of relationships that are now benefiting the new arrivals.

Our sincerest thanks go to all the Institutes that, in response to the appeal of Pope Francis, have made themselves available to open new paths, sending sisters into the field, supporting us financially and with their prayers. We ask you to continue following us, especially in this delicate and difficult moment in which the ports are closed, walls are being raised, welcoming structures are closed and now deprived of economic resources because the State has cut funds, and the operators, who have not been paid for nearly a year, are leaving.

In this scenario, what can the ten sisters in the three communities in Agrigento, Caltanissetta, and Ramacca do? In many cases, they are “simply” present to weave networks, listen, accompany, support.... and create relationships. Concretely:

In **Agrigento**, the sisters work as volunteers in some public facilities (a reception center in Siculiana, SPRAR, etc...), where it is not easy to build a constant project with the people who are arriving and departing... but it is still a space of presence, listening, accompaniment, catechesis, and prayer for those who wish; and then, in some ecclesial structures (canteen of the poor, parish), and finally, little by little, visits to families have begun.

In **Caltanissetta**, the accompaniment of migrants continues on the roads, especially with the sick or those who need medical care; the relationship was consolidated with the diocesan Caritas, which has now started working closely with the Sisters for the Italian school, in the cooking classes... and the Sunday gatherings in the parishes for Holy Mass in English and catechesis have become increasingly important, the African choir sings at Sunday Masses and on feast days, and opportunities for parishioners and migrants to get to know one another and share are increasing. The four sisters are busy from morning to night, in a large variety of activities, according to each one’s gifts and the arising needs.



In **Ramacca**, two sisters are currently working with a co-operative for unaccompanied minors who want to maintain a family lifestyle; they are present at Cara di Mineo, a sorting and reception center for people (up to 3000) waiting for documents, at liturgical moments, doing catechesis and preparing those who desire it for the sacraments.

We do not want to leave... this is why we are again coming to knock on the door of the Congregations... with the insistence of the “importunate widow of the Gospel.” Since there are no paid jobs, we depend entirely on the economic support and kindness of the Congregations, which in recent years have generously helped us and allowed us to start the fourth year of insertion in Sicily. Only in this way can we continue our international and intercongregational service.

For next September, it would be necessary to insert a sister who can replace the three who will be leaving. The experience makes us say that are some necessary requirements that make it possible to enter without too much difficulty... It's necessary to know Italian and have a driver's license... but above all, we need sisters available to live the challenge of intercongregationality, with all that this entails, in the construction of common life. We need sisters motivated by the passion for God and for humanity, capable of:

- establishing a climate of collaboration, to “create” a community that prays, lives and works together on the basis of the Gospel, with respect for each one's charisms;
- bearing the weight of suffering, impotence and frustration in apostolic service without being crushed, and accepting a humble and often hidden service;
- collaborating with the civil and ecclesial reality.

Currently, the new immigration law, inserted in the Security Decree, is creating unimaginable difficulties for immigrants and for those who work with and for them. The closure of the centers and the reduction of residence permits will lead to the loss of assistance and housing for most migrants. Most of them will become illegal and go to hide in the countryside or risk joining the ranks of the mafia and organized crime to survive... the air is full of tension, fear, and mistrust. The Church in Sicily is strongly committed to dealing with this difficult situation and asks us for our presence, help, and support. We are a small drop in an ocean of misery... **but we cannot leave too.**

## TALITHA KUM

### Highlights from the last months of 2018 to the beginning of 2019

2019 is a crucial year for Talitha Kum, which has been active for 10 years. In this year, members of the consecrated life, especially those most strongly involved in the service of fighting trafficking, are invited to Rome from 21 to 28 September 2019 to participate in Talitha Kum's First General Assembly, intended to celebrate these 10 years of activities while providing space for deepening the current situation of trafficking in the world, with a look of hope and through the identification and planning of priorities for the period 2020-2025.

### Major events in the first two months of 2019

- On 17 January, launching of the Guidelines for pastoral action against the trafficking of persons, drawn up by the Migrants & Refugees Section: during 2018, Talitha Kum was actively involved in the drafting of the final document.
- World Day of prayer and reflection on the fight against trafficking was held on 8 February, this year with the theme: "Together Against Trafficking." In this edition Talitha Kum was a partner of the Pope's World Prayer Network and presented the intention to pray for the end of trafficking.
- On the same day, the Pope's video on this theme was launched during the official announcement of Talitha Kum's program for the next 10 years.

The year that just ended was marked by several projects and initiatives in the areas of action foreseen by Talitha Kum's priorities for the four-year period 2016-2019.

### Strengthening Networks and Communication

- The elaboration of Talitha Kum's strategic plan of internal communication continues; for its drafting, we avail ourselves of the valuable advice of Sr. Bernadette Reis, fsp.
- We are still in the final phase of collecting and analyzing data to complete the Census of Talitha Kum's networks for 2018, in continuous cooperation with the Pontifical Gregorian University which, with the collaboration of its students, created the Database for Talitha Kum. This data will be made public on 7 February 2019.
- The meeting of the Talitha Kum networks in the Western hemisphere, held in Cleveland at the end of October 2018, was intended to strengthen continental networking. This meeting was possible thanks to the promotion and organization of the US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT).

- Wells of Hope. Since 1 September 2018, Sr. Marie Claude Naddaf, rgs, is the coordinator of the WOH project, which promotes collaboration and dialogue of religious and women, both Muslim and Christian, within the Mediterranean basin, as well as the identification of strategic partners, in the name of the common commitment to prevent every kind of exploitation of human lives.

## Formation and New Networks

Regarding the formation courses and workshops organized by Talitha Kum at the local level, we would like to indicate that new networks have been created in the following countries: Ghana, Burkina Faso / Niger and Cameroon. These networks were officially launched in November 2018, and the Cameroon network includes both the French-speaking and the English-speaking regions, in a necessary effort to dialogue and collaborate.

The formation course for leaders of Talitha Kum, in collaboration with the Pontifical University Antonianum—a course begun at the end of 2017 and about which we have already spoken—ended in February 2018, with a second residential session. The first positive note is that there was no dispersion during the course, but we worked together until the official conclusion. The students of the course have, in turn and with the available resources, organized workshops and days of formation in their own countries or in neighboring countries, always in the spirit of mutual collaboration and exchange in view of personal as well as professional enrichment and, so, strengthening its actions in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

## Upcoming Event

One of the events planned for the celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Talitha Kum is the campaign “Nuns Healing Hearts,” which will be officially presented during the UISG Plenary Assembly in May 2019. There is more information on the full program on Talitha Kum’s website (<https://www.talithakum.info/>) as well as on the site dedicated to the Day of Prayer (<https://preghieracontrotratta.org/?lang=it>)

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