

Permanent formation program

2016 Revitalization and discernment

5. The new evangelization and the restructuring of the order





THE NEW EVANGELIZATION AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE ORDER¹

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to show there are close links between the project for the new evangelization within the Church, and the project for restructuring the Order. Consequently, we propose to indicate a way of taking on the task of the new evangelization; which is the wider and universal framework in which the life of the Order is developed, and implies putting in to place the work of restructuring.

The project of restructuring is common to many other religious orders. Although every order will make its own particular emphasis, the word 'restructuring' is a common term in the consecrated life. This piece of information allows us to conclude that restructuring is a common effort within the Church. The calling together made by the great post-council pontiffs, the synodic assemblies and the regional episcopal conferences helps us to undertake this new evangelization.

¹ Mons. Mario Alberto Molina, Archbishop of Los Altos, Quetzaltenango-Totonicapán, Guatemala, responded with kindness and promptness to the petition of the department for History and Spirituality for the Order in April 2014. Despite the two years which have passed, his questioning as a pastor and a brother reveal an uncommon validity in order to replant our presence in the evangelical mission.

Bringing out the link between the two processes, or projects, not only allows us to contextualize the processes of restructuring in the religious orders within the horizon of the pastoral activities of the universal Church; it also helps us to see the evangelical, ecclesial and pastoral roots of this restructuring. In this way, restructuring will not focus on merely peripheral matters, and members of the religious orders will also be able to understand that one of the ways of assuming the call to the new evangelization involves seriously setting out upon the project of restructuring. Also, that taking on the principles of restructuring could mean entering into the logic of the new evangelization; or on the contrary, resisting the works of restructuring could be a sign of resistance to the new evangelization.

The new evangelization is a direct result of the Second Vatican Council. This council was brought together with the aim of “updating” the Church, or *aggiornare*, in the words of Pope John XXIII. To this end, she could then carry out her continuous mission within the new cultural, social and political circumstances of the contemporary world.

The term ‘new evangelization’ was used by John Paul II at least fifteen years after the closure of the Council². But all the definitions and descriptions which have been given to the term from the beginning, make reference to the need to renew some aspects of the mission of the Church in consideration of the cultural and social changes that describe this new age in which we live.

That is to say, the decisions which led Pope John XXIII to call the council are, in truth, the same ones that have motivated the post-conciliar popes to declare the new evangelization. It is obvious that the awareness of the social and cultural changes has become more acute in time, and that the diagnosis has become better. And it was also to be expected that the answers to said changes would become more specific, and come to be seen to be ever more relevant in time. But there is an undeniable line of continuity between the concerns at the beginning of 1959, when the council was convened, and the actual proposals for new evangelization and restructuring.

It would seem, however, that restructuring for many orders in the consecrated life has been taken on and motivated by other factors. The word restructure has

² Various dates and authors have been proposed for the first use of this expression. Nonetheless, the address by John Paul II to the General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops Council on the 9th of March, on finishing his visit to Central America, has been shown as the moment in which the expression was used in a programmed and conscious way and with the intention of a description of its intentions (cf. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1983/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830309_assemblea-celam_sp.html).

been linked, at times, to more administrative challenges. The reduction in the number of members has obliged many orders to close ministries, to unite provinces in order to better face the pastoral challenges, and to unite formation houses with the object of maximizing human resources. All these measures are in many cases necessary and even urgent; it could sometimes also be the first step in order to arrive at the heart of the problem. But the word ‘restructuring’ goes beyond the merely administrative, posing other more relevant questions.

It is necessary to put the word ‘restructuring’ within the framework of the efforts that all religious made after the council, before the word took on such urgency. That is, to adapt the consecrated life, through a recuperation of the original charism, to the new times and cultural changes and the current needs of the Church. Without a doubt, these administrative aspects are a part of restructuring, but without the desire for spiritual and pastoral conversion we are avoiding the real problem. That is, we are only focusing on the surface problem, and we head towards failure with a project which is technical but without any spiritual consistency.

As a result of Vatican II, with its constitutions and decrees, the Holy See encouraged in the consecrated life a series of reforms. These could well be seen as efforts in restructuring, in view of an updating of the council’s spirit. The reforms that had most to do with direct conciliar proposals need to be thought of as the most genuine efforts at restructuring. That is to say: the rediscovery of the original charism; historical and theological studies making this clearer; the drawing up of new constitutions and the revision of formation plans for members; programming courses and workshops for continuous formation. This has been the experience of the Augustinian Recollects.

These actions, nonetheless, have not impacted decisively upon the religious in bringing about the process of conversion and spiritual growth; or certainly in terms of depth, reach and the integrity which correspond to the efforts which were made. These efforts have achieved very uneven results, and have been insufficient in halting the process of inner secularization in the communities, or revitalizing the life of their members. Nor have they been able to stop young religious abandoning the order only a few years after their profession or ordination, encouraged committed vocations or returned to pastoral actions the joy of the Gospel.

THE CHARISM OF THE AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS, DESIRE FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

For those who look at things superficially, the call to the new evangelization by the Church and the call to restructuring by the Order seem to be two

diametrically opposed calls, or at least differentiated ones. It could be thought that one cancels out the other. The restructuring seems to focus on the order and its internal problems; whilst the new evangelization puts aside securities in order to go to the outskirts. The new evangelization is seen as a project of the universal church in an ecclesial horizontal global context; and restructuring is within the micro institutional horizon of the order.

But that's not how it works. The point of restructuring, much more than the administrative and organizational aspects, has to do with the task of restoring the initial charism of the order. The other more superficial aspects will make sense, and become vital, only as far as they are inspired by a revitalization of the order's identity. I think, that we need to link the concerns of restructuring with the demands of the new evangelization and demonstrate the relevance of restructuring as our way of taking on the new evangelization. It is necessary to read our own charismatic features in the light of the features which are particular to the new evangelization, and in this way show their common goals. In this we should be aware that the principal features are so much a part of the Christian life, that they also belong to the main elements of the new evangelization. In such a way that revitalizing the charisma which gives us an identity is, in fact, to enter into the project of the new evangelization.

The charisma and spirituality of the Order, as it has been developed in theological reflection and history, has focused on some of the features of our theology that served Augustine when articulating his monastic and spiritual theology. Augustine is a father of the Church: he belongs to a time in which the Church produced the first dogmatic expression of the faith. Therefore, it should not surprise us that Augustine's theology has close links with ecclesiology and theological anthropology in general. This focus on the fundamental gives said theology a perennial value. Throughout the centuries it has illuminated not only the consecrated life, but also the Christian life in general.

Often we have failed to show the close links that exist between the features of our spirituality, and the renewal of the Church in general. The renewal and restructuring of the Order is our path in the new evangelization, and our specific contribution to the life of the Church and society in general. If we hide this dimension, our motivation and responsibility about what it is most ours will be lost.

In the following reflection I wish to focus on some features of Augustinian spirituality. These features are a general part of Christian spirituality and essential elements of the new evangelization. The first chapter of the *Constitutions* highlights three essential points of the Augustinian-Recollect charism: the contemplative character, the community, and the apostolate. In this same chapter, the *Constitutions* add a Fifth article on the Virgin Mary. This seems to be the

well-known Marian appendix, typical of all ecclesial documents, but I think there is something more to it than devotion and piety. The invocation of the Virgin Mary is an allusion to a feature of Augustinian and monastic theology: the freedom of the Christian vocation, and pastoral action.

It could be thought that in ‘reducing’ Augustinism to something general in Christianity that I am dissolving the charism of the Order. Some may see this as a merely common spirituality. But the truth is, that no order can propose and have its own charism without belonging to the common heritage of Christian spirituality. The difference will be fundamentally about intensity, or the ways that the members of the order live this out. For this reason, I consider legitimate the reflection which I propose: which will show that features of the Recollect charism are essential to the new evangelization.

The *Constitutions* use expressions taken from the works of Saint Augustine, showing in this way the Augustinian roots of the charism. Sometimes this language can impede us from seeing that its content is up to date, and places us as a religious order at the heart of the Church. For this reason, I am going to develop a reflection not from Augustinian texts, but rather from two basic texts to the new evangelization: the document from Aparecida (DA) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (EG).

CONTEMPLATION IN ITS ORIGINS

“Enter into yourself”. This is the phrase that we listen to from the first when we enter into Augustinian spirituality. But if this phrase is not contextualized and widened, it can lead to an unproductive self-absorption, a sterile isolation. This is not a hypothetical danger, but rather a real illness which affects people who are spiritual yet unsociable. People who pray, but who are always occupied in their things.

The watchword of the interior life is orientated towards an encounter with God. It is a call to go out of oneself towards God who is above all. But going out towards an encounter with God should not be a distraction, a forgetfulness of self, but rather an encounter with God from an awareness of ourselves. For this reason, the Christian way towards God – not only Augustinian – passes by way of the interior life. Not to stay inside ourselves, but rather to go out, to transcend ourselves with the goal of situating ourselves before God. That is, projecting ourselves towards God and understanding ourselves from God.

The God to which we are going towards, through the interior life, is also a God who has gone out of himself towards that which is not God; towards creation and humanity through his Word. It is also a God departing from himself towards us. It is a God who has left himself, to go to us in his incarnate Word: in Jesus Christ,

the Son of God, made man. And in this way he has made possible an encounter with him.

It brings to mind a phrase from Pope Benedict XVI, quoted twice in the document of Aparecida and once in the Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. The phrase from Benedict is to be found in his first encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 1:

“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction...love is not only a ‘commandment’, but rather a response to the gift of love, with which he comes to meet us³.

The fact that both documents cite this passage from Benedict, means that it indicates something fundamental in our experience as Christians. This is done to show that our experience as Christians starts with a personal encounter with God, in Christ.

In effect, the Christian path does not consist in following a theological doctrine, a moral teaching, some religious rites or some techniques for spirituality and prayer. The Christian path comes from an encounter with Jesus, that opens for us a new horizon. From which we can understand ourselves, our aims in life and the meaning of our existence and its end. The doctrinal elements, the moral efforts, the religious rites, spiritual disciplines and ways of praying are consequences of this. Or maybe also annexes, which enable us to enrich, take on and develop the religious experience from its source. This word ‘source’ should not be understood in a chronological sense; as if we were talking about an experience which is only at the beginning of the Christian path. Rather, it should be understood in a practical sense, as the lasting experience which throughout life sustains our faith, hope and Christian love.

Should we then understand, and grasp hold of, the contemplative character of the Augustinian charism in light of the declaration by Aparecida and that of *Evangelii gaudium*? Indeed, we should, with the aim of showing that the contemplative character of the Augustinian charism is a mark of the Christian life. This is something which we are ourselves are called to develop as Augustinian Recollect Christians, and to help others also to discover it.

The document of Aparecida describes the formation itinerary of missionary disciples, establishing as a starting point the encounter with Jesus: “The Christ-

³ In the document of Aparecida the text appears cited explicitly twice, in the numbers 12 and 243; and in the Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 7, once. In both cases the context is about demonstrating the beginning of the Christian experience.

event is therefore the beginning of this new subject emerging in history that we call ‘disciple’” (DA 243, and thereafter follows the quote from Benedict XVI). Pope Francis does the same thing in *Evangelii gaudium* when talking about Christian joy as the fruit of having accepted the Gospel; and an experience which has to be communicated to others. He points out that the basis for this joy is the love of God, which has been shown to us in Christ. And that, therefore, this encounter with him is the basis of all Christian experience (cf. EG 7).

What is this encounter with Christ? How can it be brought about and encouraged? Is it a valid criterion in order to interpret and measure the contemplative vocation of the Augustinian Recollect?

Pope Benedict says clearly what it is not. It does not consist in the knowledge of an idea, of learning a doctrine, or discovering an ethical precept. It doesn’t even consist in knowledge of the biography and other historical facts about Jesus. It is about a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ “who gives a new perspective on life, and with that, a decisive orientation”.

How is this encounter possible? The human part is possible thanks to our ability for an inner life, the possibilities of transcendence and the capacity to put ourselves aside, to go out to others. The document of Aparecida identifies many means that make such an encounter with Jesus possible (cf. DA 246-265). These means are not alternative options, but rather complementary. All Christians should make use of every one of them, in order to strengthen their encounter with the Lord.

Firstly, there is the faith of the Church, not as a medium, rather as the proper environment for this particular experience. This gives birth to, and strengthens, the faith in this encounter with Jesus. This is a personal event, but it is not private, for it has a communal and ecclesial setting. The faith of the Church, be that in the parish or the religious community, is the context which makes the encounter with Jesus possible. The faith of the Church is a horizon opened to the believer, through an encounter with Jesus. For this same reason, it is not possible to start out on the Christian path, be that in the parish or the religious community, if what we encounter seems more like an administration centre than a community of faith. One of the great challenges of the new evangelization is to overcome the secularized climate which has invaded, with varying intensity, various communities in the Church. This has led to a privatization, or concealment, of expressions of true faith.

In the context of the faith of the Church, the first medium that makes possible an encounter with Jesus is the Gospel; that written, proclaimed, explained and transmitted by the Church. In the printed word we find the original and normative testimony about Jesus. But the Gospels come to life when they are read and

understood, explained and lived, in the context of lived faith in the Church. In this climate, an openness to transcendence is possible, not as an impersonal cosmic force, but rather as the face of a person. That is, that of Jesus, and through Jesus, that of the merciful Father: for “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). What is found on the face, and in the life, of Jesus is the witness of the Father’s love.

On numerous occasions Pope Francis, in the Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, indicates that the discovery of the love of God is the nucleus of the Gospel and the point of departure for the Christian life:

Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being (EG 8).

This encounter is obviously not a psychological experience that can be brought on by way of techniques. But it can be helped by the witness of a community that lives from this renovating experience. And through people who, with their attitudes, show that they understand and act from the awareness of God’s compassionate love made manifest in Christ.

The second important means of communicating an encounter with Jesus is the Sacred Liturgy. On the Christian and religious path, the two sacraments that sustain the journey are the sacrament of reconciliation and that of the Eucharist. The sacrament of the reconciliation prolongs throughout life the encounter with the merciful Father, who made possible the first conversion of baptism. The sacrament of reconciliation brings us together to continue walking with the Father, supported by Jesus, despite the failings, infidelities, discouragements and doubts. The sacrament of the Eucharist is the sacrament par excellence of the encounter with the Risen Christ. He talks to us in his Word read aloud, listened and explained; he feeds us through the Eucharistic species, and creates communion with us making us part of his Body.

As part of the Sacred Liturgy prayer is also mentioned, especially the celebration of the Divine Office in presence of the Holy Sacrament. It is an important practice and a way of life: that of always living in God’s presence, conscious that we should please him in all that we do.

To this medium of the liturgy could be added popular religious piety, that in some of its displays, and for some people, is a truly renovating experience of God. The intense and emotive description of the pilgrimage to the sanctuary, in number 259 of the Document of Aparecida, is an eloquent testimony of this.

Finally, DA 257 mentions the poor as a means of encounter with Jesus Christ. Those who live the faith of the Church and, who know him through the Gospel, have

united themselves to him through sacraments and prayer. Such people will also find him in serving their neighbour, who is poor and in need. And at the same time, the poor person sees in the brother or sister who extends a hand, the merciful face of the Father.

If one reads the numbers 8 to 13 of the *Constitutions* of the Augustinian Recollects, they will find that they say the same things with other words; sometimes more briefly. In this way, this initial foundation of our spirituality and charism, is the great point of departure for the new evangelization. The difference resides in that the new evangelization brings to mind a global cultural and secular context, in which this encounter with God through Jesus now takes place.

A revitalization of our contemplative charism, demands placing it within the current social and cultural context. We are called to meet with God in order to let ourselves be transformed by him, and by an encounter with Jesus. This takes place in a context of secularized culture; a culture of the immediate and the fleeting, that has renounced a meaningful vision that gives a lasting meaning to life. To be contemplatives is not a privilege of consecrated persons. It is the point of departure for the believer who, in an act of faith, demonstrates the possibility of being built up, and letting oneself being built up. And, the construction of a human community, whose reference is different from that proposed by the surrounding culture.

Contemplation is not used up on itself, rather it triggers a personal and communal way of life, and is directed toward communication. That is, contemplation conceived as an encounter with Christ has two consequences: the formation of the Church as a community of disciples and the missionary impulse that moves them to proclaim Jesus. Contemplation brings about joy, the joy of having found meaning and a lasting purpose in life, moral commitment and the effort to live with others in community. Contemplation has in itself a missionary, evangelizing, and ecclesial outreach. For he who has found Christ, desires to share this experience with others, and to recognize in the other a brother, a son of the same Father; to be God's Church.

ECCLESIAL SHAPE

When they ask as Augustinian Recollects what is the charism of the Order? The first response that comes to the mind is that our charism is community life. Because, this is the prime objective of religious consecration, as the *Rule* of Saint Augustine indicates:

“The main purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God, with one heart and one soul” (*Rule* 1.2). This proposal is reinforced further by the introduction to the *Rule*: “Before all else, beloved, love God and then your neighbour, for these are the chief commandments given to us”.

Nonetheless, if we pay closer attention to the biblical texts implicit in the passages from the *Rule*, we see clearly that Augustine alludes to passages that refer to the life of the Church, and that of the Christian. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the principal feature of the original Jerusalem community was that “the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32). Augustine, from his own ecclesiology, adds correctly “intent upon God”.

It has frequently been said, that the ecclesiology articulated in the Constitution *Lumen gentium* from Vatican II is an ecclesiology of communion. What does this phrase mean? It means to say that in this Constitution the Church presents itself “as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG, 1). The Church has the aim of fostering the union of every believer with God, and as a consequence, of being the instrument through which the union of all humanity with itself, in God, takes place.

The Church is not a simple gathering of those who think the same, as in a philosophical school of thought or a political party. These are groups that come about through the will of those who constitute them. The Church, instead, is the bringing together of those who have been reached by the saving initiative of God. This is done to unite, in himself, every person and that of all humanity. The Church is the bringing together of those who have found, with Christ, the contemplative experience that founds the Christian faith. Thus, through Christ, they have experienced the father’s love, through the gift of the holy spirit instilled in their hearts:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rm. 5:1-2.5).

A theology based on an ecclesiology of communion, is the basis for the community charism of the Augustinian recollects which creates missionary fraternity. The initial paragraphs of the fifth Chapter of the Document *Aparecida*, could be read as a commentary on the numbers 14 to 22 of the *Constitutions of the Augustinian Recollects*:

At the outset of his ministry, Jesus chooses the Twelve to live in communion with him. Likewise, today the disciples’ encounter with Jesus in intimacy is indispensable for nourishing community life and missionary activity (154). The disciples of Jesus are called to live in communion with the Father and with his dead and risen Son, in “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”.

The mystery of the Trinity is the source, model, and goal of the mystery of the Church. The communion of the faithful and of the particular churches in the people of God is based on communion with the Trinity (155). The vocation to missionary discipleship is con-vocation to communion in their church. There is no discipleship without communion. This means that a constitutive dimension of the Christian event is belonging to a concrete communion in which we can be part of an ongoing experience of discipleship and communion with the successors of the apostles and with the successor of Peter (156). Evangelization is a calling to participate in the communion of the Trinity (157).

The religious community of the Augustinians is a Church grouping, a small ecclesial community, whose internal dynamics are the same as that of the Church in general. Communal fraternity is not a distinct species, nor is it a different theological reality from that which constitutes the fraternity of the children of God, in the Church. The ecclesial community is brought together to listen to the Word of God, to which it responds in prayer; and it finds the foundation for its communion in the Eucharist. It shares in solidarity with material goods, and opens itself to the world in an attitude of missionary service. Which, in turn, inspires in society the action of God's kingdom.

Many of our religious communities are in charge of urban or rural parishes, in construction, or already built. And I ask myself if we truly understand and live as a religious community, as an ecclesial community wider than the parish. What is, therefore, the basis of forming among ourselves a community? And where is our missionary impulse, so that Jesus's disciples, under our pastoral guidance, will also be an ecclesial community?

We live in a society marked by individualism, by disintegration, by loneliness, and by a lack of support. The religious community, and every one of its members, has the mission to transmit what we try to build among ourselves outside of the community. This proposal raises quite a few practical questions: How can our identity be maintained when faced with the risk of dispersion? How can we reserve our own space in the community without it becoming isolation? How can we make the community welcoming to those outside, and supportive towards its own members? But these questions should be responded to, in each case, with missionary creativity and ecclesial openness.

This ecclesial foundation of our community and our charism, is for me, the most pertinent contribution that we can make in the new evangelization; in order to build the Church of Jesus Christ. But at the same time, it seems also that is the most neglected feature in our missionary outreach. For often we are not being clear about expressing what we are, and what we are called to be, as evangelizers.

With our focus on the first chapter on the Constitution *Lumen gentium*, we can make a brief review of the ecclesial features of the religious community. In the first place, the community is always understood as coming from God. It comes from the Father, who has a plan of love and salvation, which has been unfolded in the history of humanity. In this plan, the call to the Christian life and the vocation to the religious life which each one receives, is understood. And in this plan, the communal life is understood as a congregation of those who have been called by God to be his holy people. God has realized this call through Jesus Christ, who proclaimed with his preaching and his miracles, with his death and resurrection, the seed of God's Kingdom, which has given us the Church.

Our place in the Church is made present for us through the religious community. This community is not a parallel or isolated Church, but rather the concrete form of the Church for us. From this, in the communion of the Body of Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are united to the universal Church. This, in turn, is also present in the particular Church and the parish community in which the community lives. Thus the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of the Resurrected Christ, communicates to us new life; the salvation obtained in his paschal mystery.

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, communicates the new life which makes possible the love of God and neighbour; the main commandment which we have been given. The Holy Spirit makes us brothers and sisters, having all things in common and uniting our hearts in God. In this way the Trinitarian basis of the Universal Church is shown, as a theological foundation of the ecclesial form of our community of faith.

THE MISSIONARY INITIATIVE

The *Constitutions* talk about the 'apostolic character' of the Order. The word 'apostolic' has suffered from a kind of technical specialization. It is used less and less to refer to the evangelical, pastoral and missionary activity of the Church and Christians. It is instead reserved for designating the nature of the Church, and the episcopate as a sign of ecclesial authenticity. But what the *Constitutions* refer to as the apostolic character is nothing more than the missionary impulse, which comes from contemplation. In fact, the Document *Aparecida* and the *Evangelii gaudium* explain that the mission is an inevitable part, and almost a sign of, the authenticity of the contemplative experience. The missionary impulse is the counter balance, and the necessary complement, of the contemplative experience.

Normally, in a community context, contemplation and mission are opposing ways of life. It is said that if you are a contemplative you cannot be missionary, and if you are a missionary you cannot be contemplative. The apostolic and missionary life seems to leave no time for praying. This erroneous conclusion is probably arrived at because of some expressions from the same Saint Augustine.

They appear to juxtapose the monastic life and the active life, and consider monks as those that have time to dedicate themselves to God. As a consequence, the monastic cloister is the way of life for those that dedicate themselves to contemplation.

But Augustine himself, in the middle of his many pastoral tasks, never stopped being a contemplative. And none of the holy pastors and missionaries, highly active people, abandoned the contemplative aspect of their lives. In addition, a woman in the cloistered life, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, is the patron of the missions and missionaries. Therefore, it is necessary to dismantle some prejudices transmitted by custom and misunderstanding. The missionary impulse is born of a contemplative attitude, and is fed by the constant contemplation of the Lord. It is incorrect to identify contemplation with the cloistered or monastic life, for they are different things.

The cloistered or monastic life has different reasons and aims. The cloistered or monastic life has the intention to live the eschatological dimension of the Christian life. It is a particular way of evangelical presence in this world, and expresses the fleeting sense of this present world. But contemplation, the experience of encountering the Lord, is the origin of 'all' forms of Christian life. And especially of those who are particularly committed to a special form of evangelization and mission. Every Christian should be a contemplative. Both the lay person who lives in the world, transforming lived reality according to the ideals of God's Kingdom, and the male or female religious dedicated to the many forms of charitable service. This is true also of the missionary priest or pastor of a parish, as well as obviously the monks and nuns who live out a particular way of life in the cloister.

Contemplation is the source, the fount from which spirituality and witness come forth. It is inconceivable that an evangelizer and missionary expects to exercise his ministry depriving himself of the fount which sustains him, which is contemplation. This is true of the religious, the secular priest, and the lay person dedicated to giving evangelical witness. Therefore, mission and contemplation cannot be opposed, as if one would take away time from the other. Mission and contemplation should be integrated. Missionary activity without contemplation loses the zeal that feeds it, and contemplation without mission falls under the suspicion of being inauthentic. This is in truth the conviction: it is not possible to keep quiet the joy of having encountered the Lord.

He who has discovered, and is fed by, this joy of having encountered and talked with God cannot but communicate it to others. It is something spontaneous, simple, and part of daily life. Pope Francis expresses it in this way in *Evangelii gaudium*:

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn. 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans came to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (Jn. 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for? (EG 120).

What does the Christian communicate when he is a missionary? He communicates what he is, his way of life, his way of being. He communicates the joy of knowing that God loves us, lights up our lives, and recognizes us as his sons and daughters. Therefore, we spread the calling together, in which we treat and receive each other as brothers and sisters. This is the foundation and the culmination of the Church and the religious community. We communicate in our attitudes and words the mercy of God who receives those who suffer, who grants forgiveness to the sinner, and sustains the marginalized who suffer exclusion. This is done in order to make them brothers and sisters in the Church of Jesus Christ. We communicate the hope of a future open to life, and a vocation based in the fullness of God to which we are called by the Holy Spirits' gift.

As Augustinian Recollects our missionary dimension as consecrated persons is expressed in three channels, present in the *Constitutions*. The first, and oldest of them, is the missionary aspect. We understand the missionary aspect as going out to announce the love of God shown in Jesus Christ, to those who do not know him. From the beginning of the Recollection, in Spain, the Philippines, Columbia and Panama, the missionary and evangelizing desire was an integral part of the Augustinian Recollect charism. All this arose from the contemplation. The mission was not a betrayal of the contemplative aim of the Recollection. Rather it was the

channel that expressed the action of a renewed spirituality. It removed all that was superfluous, in order to centre the attention on God and his love revealed in Christ.

This can be seen with more clarity from what *Aparecida* and *Evangelii gaudium* tell us. It can be seen in these documents how an authentic evangelizing impulse is only sustained if it is constantly fed by an assiduous contact with the Lord. He is the one we find in the Sacred Scriptures (especially in the Gospels), in the liturgy, in our neighbour; especially in the poor.

The mission to evangelize has a fundamental aim: to share with our neighbour the experience of an encounter with the Lord. The goal is that they will also find the Person that will transform their lives. Certainly the mission and evangelization has a component of integral human development. For charity to one's neighbour concerns itself in helping them to find a solution to their present needs and problems. But it is a dimension derived, and as a consequence of, evangelization.

One of the real dangers is to lose focus of the aim of the mission. This has been the case of situations of basic and chronic need, in which many people and communities must evangelize. These visible, palpable and searing needs make invisible the deep and equally clamouring needs of a search for meaning, of dignity and an objective for their lives. In some cases, it has been thought that helping or alleviating these temporal needs is the main task and effort of evangelization. But that is not true. The poor, even the really poor, do not only live on bread but also desire to listen to the word that comes from God's mouth. This dignifies them, recognizing them as sons. It gives meaning to their lives from the experience of the love of God, showing them the meaning of their existence from a vocational call to eternal life. What's more, it can be argued that the sense of dignity and freedom and the meaning of life is what is necessary. It is precisely this that gives to people and communities the creativity and the strength to get out of marginalization and poverty.

This missionary dimension is normally carried out in the parish. The parish can be considered missionary if the greater part of the inhabitants in its territory are poorly evangelized. Particularly if they are in a rural zone, with basic and slow roads coupled with limited or inexistent material resources. At present we also find that parishes in urban areas, whose inhabitants belong to a globalized culture, also have to change their pastoral activities. They need to become missionaries, for the greater part of the people that live in the area do not know Christ and the Gospel, or they know it in a very limited way.

Aparecida (370) asks us to pass from activities "of mere conservation to being decidedly missionary". And the way in which it describes the situation of parishes in Latin America could be generalized for many other places in the Christian world:

The number of Catholics who come to our Sunday celebration is limited; the number of those who are afar, and of those who do not know Christ is immense. Missionary renewal of parishes is urgent in the evangelization of both large cities and the countryside in our continent, which is demanding imagination and creativity on our part so as to reach the multitudes who yearn for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The creation of new pastoral structures is an issue especially in the urban environment, because many of those structures arose in other times to respond to the needs of the countryside (DA 173).

Another area for evangelization in the Order is education. Pope Francis says: “Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture” (EG, 134). Likewise, pastoral activities in education have succumbed to the pressure of a globalized culture. Educational efforts have given way to the demands of “production, competition and the market”, from an implicit and reductive anthropological model (cf. DA, 328). Nonetheless, “when we talk of a Christian education, we understand that the teacher educates a project of the human person in which Jesus dwells with his transforming power of new life” (DA, 332).

The educational community in the Catholic school is an ecclesial community. The evangelizing and missionary impulse is directed primarily towards the students, the teaching body and the administration; but also reaches all families, principally those of the students. This supposes that there are people, filled with the missionary spirit that comes from having encountered the Lord, in charge of the educational ecclesial community: pastors and evangelizers, ordained ministers, religious and lay people. The sign of excellence in the colleges in our charge is not only the academic success of our students. We also need to instil the capacity of impressing upon students the need to transform the professional, political, economic and social world according to the Good News of Jesus.

GRACE AND RESPONSIBILITY

To build a Church, be that a community, a parish, a diocese or the Universal Church, is fruit of diligence and human effort; but it is above all fruit of the gift and grace of God. When Saint Paul reflects on his work in Corinth he says quite clearly:

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1Cor. 3,5-7).

The building of the Church, like the building of a religious community, is the work of the grace and favour of God. We all take part and put in our part, and make the best effort we can, but the fruits do not depend on us. Unlike the manager of a business, whose effectiveness and solvency is measured by the results obtained, in the Church the measure for achieving the responsibility is not measured by the results; but rather in the effort and the creativity of the work done. Christians, whatever their mission and vocation in the Church, should measure the success of their diligence, not on the results obtained, but rather on the amount of effort and talent employed in carrying it out: “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” (Lk. 17:10). In the words of Pope Francis, in *Evangelii gaudium*:

Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper, which escapes all measurement. It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit. The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time (EG, 279).

A similar attitude requires us to progress in trusting God, which is shown in prayer. Now this prayer is understood as the handing over to God all our own effort and determination, so that He will make it grow as he wills. We are neither owners of the Church nor of the religious community. They are the Lord’s, who knows how to guide them to the fullness of life to which they are ordered.

This is the Marian sense of ecclesiology. The *Constitutions* refer explicitly to the Virgin Mary in article five of the first chapter, which describes the charism and the peculiar features of the Order. Nonetheless, this article falls short in the description of the Marian meaning of the Church and the community. I see this meaning in the way in which the Virgin Mary describes the significance of herself in the work of salvation, in her canticle of thanksgiving. This canticle develops two themes. In one sense it shows the awareness of Mary, and her implication in a meaningful way, in the great work of saving humanity. But it also shows her full awareness, in herself and for herself, that she is merely an instrument who has done nothing; rather it has been the work of God in her:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all

generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree (Lk. 1: 47-49. 52).

This is what the Church and the religious community are when they are seen from the human point of view. With this knowledge we should act as those who have the responsibility to guide the Church in any one of its manifestations, from the small community up until the Universal Church. New evangelization and restructuring is fruit of the grace and favour of God, who acts through responsible human effort; this cannot be lacking, but its results cannot be predicted or foreseen beforehand.

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

Joy is the moving and emotional dimension of the experience of salvation. Salvation is not an academic hypothesis, an illusory discourse, an empty promise, a vain sentiment. It is seen in those who have found the forgiveness of their sins, the meaning of life, the goal of their works and the foundation of their hope through an encounter with Jesus Christ. Done with the love of God and with the faith of the Church, they experience the joy that is fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel leaves a mark of joy on those who receive it, because the Gospel is confirmed by the joy of those who give witness to Jesus.

Pope Francis has presented an outline for his pontificate in the Apostolic Exhortation titled *The joy of the Gospel*. He has shown us that the Gospel continually invites us to be joyful. But he asks us if we are reluctant to enter into this river of joy, which runs throughout the New Testament? (cf. EG, 5).

The restructuring of the Order, as the tangible way in which we take on the new evangelization, has to also be a witness of joy, of hope and light; for us, and the world. The restructuring of the Order ought to have as its main goal the revitalizing of the very same institutional charism in every one of us, its members. All the other administrative reorganizing will be coherent in as far as it causes, and is based upon, the renewal of the institutional charism; which the *Constitutions* state explicitly in Chapter 1.

Nonetheless, in this article I have wanted to show that our charism is not an obscure hypothesis, a sectarian doctrine or an outdated proposal. Rather, that it agrees point by point with the basic and essential elements of the scheme of the new evangelization as it is expressed in the documents of the Church. This relevance of our charism owes itself to the fact that it is inspired by the teachings of a Father of the Church like Saint Augustine, who has illuminated with his doctrine all the movements of ecclesial renewal at various points in history.

Our way of life, because it is fully ecclesial, is completely appropriate for the present time. We have as our own heritage elements that have been identified as

constitutive to the new evangelization. We are called therefore to be promoters of the new evangelization, as much as in what pertains to the renewal of our own religious community, as for that of encouraging it in the greater Church in the ministries that we carry out.

Let us recover and grow in that “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EG, 10, quoting EN, 80).

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