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St. Scholastica's Priory

Manila

Dear Sisters,

In the West and in a Broadway song, June gives us an image of “bursting out all over”, an exuberant ode to the fullness of spring! To us, the month of June brings us a “back-to-school,” back to routine, back to the usual business of life. Vacation is over-- picnicking, travels, summer frolics are gone. Back to work! Although the “ordinary things in life”, the routinary schedule, etc, seem boring, they are actually what give a certain solid structure to our existence. They discipline our days and enable us to produce, to achieve, to spur us on to fulfil our objectives and to realize our dreams. It may also happen that amid the predictable order of things, some new challenges may emerge, some unexpected opportunities might present themselves, some unplanned scenario might come about.

So as June begins, let us welcome the ordinary flow of our life in its routinary activities and regular schedules which form the meat and bones of our existence. At the same time let us pray for the wisdom to recognize challenges and opportunities when they present themselves before us, as well as the courage to meet them with creative commitment and resolute decisions.

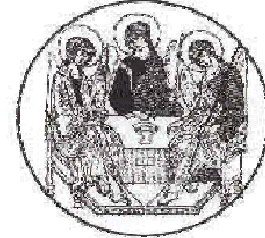
Lovingly yours,

*A. Mary John Manangan OSB*  
Sister Mary John Manangan, OSB

# STATIO CONFERENCE

## LITURGICAL REFLECTIONS on the Feast of the Bl. Trinity

By Sr. Pia Lansang, OSB



### I. THE BLESSED TRINITY in the LITURGICAL YEAR

#### 1. END OF THE EASTER CYCLE

We just finished the Easter Cycle, 50 days from Easter until Pentecost, and said a ritual good-bye to the Easter candle. Now, on the Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Bl. Trinity. It will be followed in the next days by the feasts of Corpus Christi and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the feast of the Bl. Trinity we resume the long period of “Ordinary Time” which was interrupted before Lent.

#### 2. TRINITY SUNDAY, a “doctrinal” feast?

People readily go for big feasts and celebrate with all the trappings and some traditional practices. Think of our own convent customs: Pentecost and all that flaming red. There are those little “red cards” distributed each year with a “gift of the Spirit” written on it. Turn it around and you get a “fruit” of the Holy Spirit for the year. Or think of *Corpus Christi* and the elaborate processions in some countries. Or the Feast of the Sacred Heart and our Act of Consecration, Adoration and Litany. But Trinity Sunday? Who gets excited about the Bl. Trinity?

We do know that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most fundamental in our Christian faith. However, it is a teaching, that probably most of us would prefer not to think much about, much less having to explain. I remember how one priest told us about his seminary professor who said that one could speak about the Bl. Trinity for only about 2 minutes. And that if you spoke about the Bl. Trinity for more than 2 minutes, you will likely have committed some heresy. And then this professor spoke about the Bl. Trinity for two hours! In fact, he spoke about the Bl. Trinity 2x-a-week for an entire semester.

There is, of course, always the danger of tending to look at the Trinity as a mere doctrine. It is something we learned with our minds and reason. In fact, as a child I memorized from a little yellowish catechism the question-and-answer section on the Trinity. Q & A: “How many Gods are there?” A: “One.” Q: “How many Persons are there in one God?” A: “Three.” Q: “Who are these three Persons?” A: “The Father, son and Holy Spirit.” It was still a kind of unreflected faith. Now that I’ve grown, I need a new language about God.

#### 3. A “MATHEMATICAL” FORMULA?

I remember a European lady Lieutenant Col. who was one of those highly organized persons. I imagined her as being surely used to giving marching orders (?) “one, two, three” to those she was in-charge of when doing exercises. Although not a Catholic, she loved our Christian liturgy. But our doctrines such as that of the Trinity, were something else. One day, out of the blue, she popped the question emphatically “Three is One, and One is Three” -- “1+1+1 equals 1”. “How

can you (Christians) believe “suuuuch” things?? And truly, this “mathematical approach” does not speak much to many of us, as well.

#### **4. A WELL-KNOWN ANECDOTE ON THE TRINITY**

At this point I recall the famous little story about St. Augustine and the Bl. Trinity; Augustine - a great thinker, theologian and mystic. The story goes that St. Augustine was one day walking on the beach contemplating the mystery of the Trinity. As he did this, he saw a boy in front of him who had dug a hole in the sand and was going out to the sea, again and again, and bringing some water to pour into the hole. St. Augustine asked him:

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to pour the entire ocean into this hole.” (the boy replied)

“That’s impossible, the whole ocean will not fit in the hole you have made” said

St. Augustine. The boy replied,

“And you cannot fit the Trinity in your tiny little brain.”

The story concludes by saying that the boy vanished as St. Augustine had been talking to an angel ([www.stories of Trinity.st.augustine htm](http://www.storiesoftrinity.st.augustine.htm)).

#### **II. BL. TRINITY AND THE APPROACH OF LECTIO DIVINA**

The doctrine of the Bl. Trinity, a doctrinal feast, very gradually emerged in the Church after several centuries of meditation on the life of Jesus which shows him not only as a totally FREE PERSON; his freedom rooted in his relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We see Jesus as a Trinitarian Person, always in loving communion with His Father and filled with the Spirit. And we, too, are called to be grounded in this Trinitarian reality of our God. How can we get grounded in this great God?

The approach of meditation and contemplation on Jesus and his life and actions is something so familiar to us. Our daily *Lectio Divina* is surely one very good approach to enter into this great mystery of the Trinity. Going beyond a mere intellectual approach, and engaging in the integrated method of *reading, reflecting, praying and contemplating* can lead us to understanding the deeper significance of the Bl. Trinity in our lives. Still we could ask, is this feast of the Blessed Trinity something that people can readily identify with? What does this have to do with our lives? .

#### **III. TWO KINDS OF LITURGICAL FEASTS**

The Vatican II reform of the liturgy decreed: “*The minds of the faithful should be directed primarily on to the feasts of the Lord, whereby the mysteries of salvation are celebrated throughout the year.*” (SC #108)

From this flows two kinds of liturgical feasts:

1. The first kind of liturgical feasts are those which deal with the main events of Jesus’ life. Centered on Christ, the focus of the Church’s liturgy is always on Jesus. That is why the main feasts in the liturgical year are those which deal the life of Christ.

2. TRINITY SUNDAY belongs to the second kind of feasts, along with *Corpus Christi*, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In these feasts we celebrate some aspects of our faith, e.g., the Triune God; Real Presence in the Body and Blood of Christ, and so on. ( cf. *De Verteuil, Lectio Divina with the Sunday Gospels, A-p.114 ff; B- 117;C-124*).

#### IV. MEDITATION ON THE WORD OF GOD

Reading and meditating on the gospel texts (*Lectio*) chosen for each feast helps us to enter more deeply into these mysteries (events) of the life of Jesus. In this meditation the Church invites us to experience these mysteries as being actualized in the liturgy, here and now – living in us again. The liturgy is not just a mere ritualistic re-enactment or commemorative ceremony. *Lectio* leads us to recognize these mysteries from our own human experiences and those of others (*Lectio* of Life). And this process will lead us to be transformed evermore into the likeness of Jesus. As we pray at the end of the rosary “*We imitate what they contain and hope to obtain what they promise.*” (op.cit., A-pp.114-5.)

#### V. THE GOSPEL TEXT of TRINITY SUNDAY: Matthew 28:16-20

Our Gospel text of only 5 verses forms the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew. Known as a “missionary text,” it is considered the goal towards which the entire Gospel points toward. It is a summary of Matthew’s Gospel. Briefly, let us reflect on the word of God. You can dwell on any word or phrase which “burns” in your heart, and allow grace to set it aflame.

**“Now the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.”**  
This verse describes a poignant moment: Jesus’ farewell at , -- the Ascension. Jesus’ departure was both a beginning and an end for his disciples: the end of his physical presence, and the beginning of His presence in a new way. “**Galilee**” – like for each of us, a place can be of great significance, e.g. birthplace of my calling; the starting point of my spiritual journey; memories of a loved person, and so on. For the disciples, going to Galilee seems to point to a full circle in the story of their discipleship: their early encounter with the Lord, the call and following of Jesus. And now, after 3 years, he will leave them.

**“the disciples went ....to the MOUNTAIN to which Jesus directed them...”**

The “mountain” recalls to mind the other sites of revelation in the Gospel: the mountain of the Beatitudes; the Transfiguration; Gethsemani, etc. In the OT: we see Moses going up the mountain to seek the face of God; Elijah’s journey to the mountain of God.

What is the significance of “Galilee” and the “mountain” in my own spiritual journey? Describe the “mountain” in my life where I encountered the Lord?

*Prayer: Lord, help me recognize the moments in my life when you reveal yourself to me. Lead me to climb the mountain of the Lord...that you may teach me your ways, and that I may walk in your paths. (cf. Isaiah 2:2)*

**“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”** Some understand this “authority” to mean the “might” and “power” that belongs to God. These words recall the prophecy of Daniel (ch. 17:4) where someone like the Son of man is “*given dominion, glory and*

*a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion...*"

All authority comes from God. This is also true of the authority of Jesus which he received from his Father. We, too, as missionaries, receive authority to proclaim the good news in the name of the Church. Jesus hands over authority to his disciples; he will leave them and entrusts practically the world to them. Jesus decided to leave his mission in the hands of the disciples, human instruments, with their gifts and weaknesses. Jesus did not seem to worry about the future.

What is my attitude to being in authority? Our own authority of any kind, big or small, long-term or short term is given, not ours by right. Therefore we cannot claim it. Do I hear an invitation to "let go"? How do I feel when a big assignment that I like is taken away from me?

Do I exercise my authority humbly and willingly, -- in a spirit of service, -- and ready to trust as I turn it over when the time comes? Do I share my authority, feeling free to delegate at any time and to empower others?

*Prayer*

*Lord, help me not to cling to those I am in charge of. Help me to be like Jesus when he bade his disciples to "go..." in his place and to carry on.*

*We pray for all who exercise some form of authority: parents over their children; teachers over their students; political leaders over their constituents, spiritual guides over their directees.*

**"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,...."** This is the great missionary mandate given to the whole church by the risen Christ. All of us have a share in this mandate —to become heralds of the good news in our words and deeds. Today, in our time, the risen Lord continues to pour out his Holy Spirit upon his people that we may renew and strengthen the Body of Christ through effective service (mission) locally and worldwide. From this mandate flows our own missioning at our Rite of Profession, where we receive the mission Cross as members of an international missionary congregation.

**"GO"** is a very dynamic command: Move. Walk. Don't just sit and stand still. Be on your way. Hurry. Even run in order to share the Good News so people can see what a great God we have. Beyond the confines of what the apostles were used to while Jesus was with them, they now must go anywhere and everywhere – even to the ends of the earth

What are the daily circumstances in my daily life where I hear the word, "Go"? How do I affirm my being a missionary when I am sent to a new station? Given the strength that God gives me, am I willing to be sent even to the foreign missions?

*Prayer*

*Lord, thank you for calling me to our missionary congregation. Help me to recognize my mission in all the tasks given to me. May I find new and creative ways of proclaiming your love to all peoples.. We pray for missionaries, especially our own Sisters. Be close to them esp. in times of difficulties. Grant them joy in their work and bless them.*

**To "all nations".....**a call to be a universal family. The good news is for all races and colors. For

all peoples of the world. Today many of our Sisters are engaged in Inter-religious dialogue and ecumenical work. We work for unity, respecting each other's differences. We underscore what unites rather than what separates us: a call to mutual respect and learning from each other.

How do I contribute to unity and understanding in my experience of living in an international congregation? How do I exercise hospitality towards those other beliefs? How can I reach out more to the poor in my prayer and work?

*Prayer*

*Lord, free me from prejudices in my dealings with other cultures and races. Grant me a welcoming spirit especially to those who are different and to all in need.*

**“baptizing them the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** As it was 2,000 years ago, all new members are incorporated into the community of the Triune God. Do I recall the date of my Baptism when I became the dwelling place of the Trinity? The day I was immersed into the life-giving waters, I was born into the life of the Trinitarian God: *“For the newly baptized, the Father becomes the origin and goal of all living; the Son, in Christ, becomes the model through whom that goal is reached; the Spirit becomes the energizing source by which we go through the Son to the Father.”*

*(F.Doyle, Sunday Scripture Reflection, [www.sacred.space](http://www.sacred.space))*

How can I become an instrument of birth and rebirth in community? What is my “water of salvation” that I bring to the poor in our society?

**“..... I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** Jesus promises that he would be with his disciples until the end of time. Jesus does not leave those he loves as orphans; he promises to send them the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 2:1-4), assuring them of his power and counsel.

## **VI. GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE IN OUR MISSION: SOME RELATED TEXTS**

Already in the OT, we read about God's faithful assurance to all those he calls and sends: “Do not be afraid...”; “I will be with you”. We read about MOSES being sent to deliver God's chosen people from Egypt (Ex 3:12);

JOSHUAH (1:5,9) called upon as successor to Moses *“I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you. Be valiant and have courage...”*

GIDEON (Judges 6:16) sent to defeat the people of Midian; SOLOMON AND DAVID (1 Kings 1: 34-37); JEREMIAH (1:8)

In the NT, Peter testifies to God's faithful presence in Jesus' life. God anointed him whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus went about “doing good and healing the sick” because God was with him (Acts 10:38). And finally, as has been said, Jesus himself promises this abiding presence to his own disciples (Mt 28:20b). Today, this same promise is likewise given to us, as we go in obedience to our mission, with all the challenges and possibilities that go with it.

*Prayer*

*(God's Faithful and Abiding Love)*

*“I am there; I will be with you”*

*I am there – when you are anxious and afraid*

*I am there – when you have doubts and worries*

*I am there – when you are down and discouraged*

*I am there – when you feel hesitant and lost*

*I am there -- like a light that inspires your decisions*

*I am there – like an arm that supports you with love and faithfulness*

*I am there – like a mother who feels with you*

*I am there – like a father that makes you feel secure*

*I am there – like a voice that calls and tells you*

*“Be not afraid, I shall be with you always.”*

*(Adapted from a Text, Author unknown)*

## **VII. THE ANTIPHONS for LAUDS and VESPERS**

(LOH, pp. 701-8): A look at the antiphons for Lauds and Vespers of Trinity Sunday shows us three liturgical motifs:

1. The acclamation of the Bl. Trinity is predominant and runs through the short texts. Almost repetitious (like a *reminatio*): “glory and praise”; “honor and glory”; “worship, adoration and thanks” this *laudatio* abounds in a thematic unity.

2. Petitions are expressed: “save us”; “set us free”; “give us life” pointing to our need of God’s mercy and life-giving support in our human weakness and fragility. We sometimes feel lost in a world of confusion; sometimes lost in insecurity, self-doubt and discouragement. Who does not long for genuine liberation that we may live more fully?

3. Qualities or attributes used in reference to the Persons of the Bl. Trinity: the Holy Spirit as “constant friend and guide”; the Father as “Creator and Ruler” of all that exists. Jesus is implied as Savior and Redeemer. The 3rd and final antiphon of 2nd Vespers is a triple “holy...” which rises like a beautiful cadence to the whole set of texts, and reminds us of Rev. 4:8-10 — of the 4 living creatures singing day and night “holy, holy, holy” to the One on the throne.

## **VIII. GIVING GLORY AND PRAISE TO GOD – WHY?**

God deserves glory, praise and honor not only in our worship but in all we do, in the exercise of our God-given gifts (1 Peter 4:7-11) – in our ministries, in our service of one another. It is God’s power that is behind everything and “To him alone belong glory and power for ever and ever.” (1 Pet 4:11) The RB echoes this attitude in ch. 57:9, “That in all things God may be glorified” – now a well-loved short ejaculatory prayer which the children, students and teachers in our local Benedictine schools say, almost as a habit, in conclusion of their activities.

Our whole liturgy is, in fact, filled not only with hymns of praise, but also with shorter forms of acclamations and doxologies (“*doxa*” + “*logos*” = *a word of glory & praise*). The word “praise” means to say good things about another. It is associated with to “admire,” “honor,” “extol,” “commend.” Christian praise is the “*joyful thanking and adoring God, the celebration of his goodness and grace (Ps 34:1)*. This simply implies that the act of praising is rightfully due to God alone.” ([www.allabt.com/praising\\_god.htm](http://www.allabt.com/praising_god.htm)) Psalms 96:4 and 145:3 speak of God being worthy of praise for his greatness. 2 Samuel 22:4 and the Book of Revelation 4:11 echo the same sentiment, “*you are worthy, Lord our God, ...to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*”

As a sign of reverence to the Bl. Trinity, we make a liturgical bow in reverence everytime we sing a doxology. Typically a sung expression of praise to the Holy Trinity, the doxology usually also appears at the end of canticles, psalms and hymns, the latter usually a final verse of important hymns in the Church. A doxology not only praises God, but is a short declaration of faith in the co-equality of the three Persons of the Bl. Trinity. (<http://wikipedia.org>). Doxologies occur of course in the Eucharistic prayer (“Through him, with him...”). We speak of this Great Doxology, as well as of the other big “*Gloria in excelsis Deo*”, while we normally refer to the “Glory be...” as the “Lesser Doxology”.

Again, why praise God? We praise God because of his presence in our lives, and because he continually sustains us. Our praise and thanks to God strengthens our faith. Recall God’s dwelling in the temple filled with a cloud signifying God’s glory in Chron 5:13-14.

*Prayer*

*I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. Teach me to praise you, O Lord, with all my heart, my mind and my soul.*

## **IX. THE OFFICE OF READINGS**

I look through the “Lessons” even if we, as MBS, do not regularly pray this part of the Office. It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, taken from the First letter of St. Athanasius (4<sup>th</sup> c.) which describes the Trinity as

*a “wholly creative and energizing reality, self-consistent and undivided in its active power, for the Father makes all things through the Word and in the Holy Spirit, and in this way the unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved.” (Monastic Lectionary for the Divine Office, Bk III, p. 224)*

Athanasius also points out that “even the gifts that the Spirit dispenses to individuals are given by the Father through the Son....”(ibid., p. 225). An alternative Reading is taken from the poems by St. Gregory Nazianzen, in defense of the doctrine of the Bl. Trinity. Here Gregory gives a summary of his thought and teaching on the Bl. Trinity, a personal note on baptism and the Trinity:

*“ In the one God are three pulsations that move the world. Through them I became a new and different person when I came out of the font, where my death was buried, into light -- a man restored to life from the dead. If God cleansed me so completely, then I must worship him with my whole being.” (ibid., p. 227)*

## **X. BENEDICTINES AND THE LITURGY OF THE BL. TRINITY**

The historical Context of the Mass to the Bl. Trinity goes back to Abbot Alcuin of the Abbey of Martin of Tours. The feast of the Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity was born in a time of controversy, when Arianism which denied the divinity of Christ, and consequently put into peril faith in God, Father, Son and Spirit, together with the equality of the three divine Persons.

Around 800, a votive Mass of the Trinity was composed to be used on Sundays to give them a more Trinitarian emphasis. The Mass is the work of Abbot Alcuin. The feast is first attested in Liege, Belgium in the early 10<sup>th</sup> c., at the time of Bishop Stephen (cf. “*Days with the Lord*,” vol.7, p. 320).

Later on, Benedictine monasteries of Gaul and the Frankish regions celebrated the feast of the

Trinity on the Sunday after Pentecost as we have it still today. (*ibid.*, p. 320).

The Preface is found, as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, in a liturgical book (Sacramentary). Before the liturgical reform of Vat. II, this Preface to the Bl. Trinity was used on all Sundays after Pentecost. The Preface is a liturgical expression of the faith in the three Persons of the Holy Trinity as we joyfully proclaim their “equality in majesty” and “undivided splendor.” (*Sacramentary 1985, P43/459*).

## **XI. IMAGES OF THE BLESSED TRINITY**

Our faculty of imagination can often inspire us through images that will imprint in our minds an otherwise seemingly “abstract” reality. Sacred images and religious icons can serve to touch our hearts and lead us to reflection and prayer. This can help to prevent a mere intellectual approach to the Mystery.

### **1. THE SYMBOL OF THE SHAMROCK (Clover)**



We all know the little green plant with its three heart-shaped leaves which Irish people love to use as a pin or brooch when they celebrate their national Feast of St. Patrick on March 17. The meadows and fields are full of them and you see sheep quietly chewing on this lush green ground cover. According to pious legend tradition, St. Patrick used the shamrock or clover with its three leaves as a symbol (visual aid) of the Trinity when he evangelized the Irish people.

The story goes that St. Patrick arrived in Ireland in his youth and found employment first as a slave. He had the task of herding the sheep in the hills of Antrim county. In his lonely solitude as a young shepherd he must have learned about the clover plants that his flock feasted on. Since he escaped after some years, he later returns to convert the pagan Irish. We can imagine his creativity in stooping down and plucking a shamrock and using this as a teaching aid to illustrate the Bl. Trinity as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Just as the shamrock was one plant with three identical leaves, so too was God one God in three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, we can look upon the shamrock as the symbol of the evangelization of Ireland. It is also the national emblem of Ireland.

### **2. THE TRINITY ICON BY RUBLEV**

This classic Russian Trinity icon by Andrei Rublev (sometimes spelled as “Roublev”) is a meditation in itself. So I am attaching a separate meditation to this article, which follows in the next pages. (*cf. pp. 19 ff below*) Once you see it, you will immediately recognize it as it is often used in stampitas and bookmarks, and so on. The Russian artist (Rublev) depicts the Trinity as the three angels whom Abraham adored as “one Lord” in the famous story “Under the Oak tree in Mamre” (*Gen 18:1-21*). This Trinity icon is considered one of the most perfect icons of Russia and is recognized especially by the Eastern Church. A more modern replica of Rublev’s icon, of brighter colors, appears in cards at the Turvey Abbey of Bedfordshire (England).

## **XII. THE GOD OF LOVE AND INTIMACY**

In one of the Gospel readings at Mass before Pentecost (Jn 14:21-26) John speaks movingly

about God's desire to be intimate with us. On so many occasions Jesus reveals God to us. His whole life is a revelation of the Father. Allow me to quote the text in its original form.

**Jesus** says to his disciples (today, we = men and women alike, are his new disciples!). Allow me to quote the biblical text as is:

*“he who **loves me** will be loved by my **Father**. “Anyone who **loves me** I, too, will **love him and reveal myself to him**”*

*“Anyone who **loves me** will be true to **my word**;  
and my **Father** will **love him**;  
we will come to him  
and make our **dwelling place** with him...”*

***The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit**  
whom the **Father** will send in my name,  
will instruct you in everything...”*

Here Jesus clearly shows us a God of love. And a God who wants to enter into intimacy with us (dwell in us). I would like to share some thoughts from a 2006 homily of Fr. Fermin, OP. His words take up the analysis of what St. John says about God which of course, is a better approach to understanding the Trinity.

John says that “God is love”. All of us have experienced love of some kind (a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend, and so on), in one way or the other. If we want to have an approximate idea who God is, we better ask ourselves what love really is.

In the proper sense of the word, love applies to people, and expresses that 2 people feel close to one another, and are committed to one another. The relationship that love establishes can take many forms, but the love between 2 persons finds its noblest and most complete expression in marriage, which is a commitment to share one's whole person and one's entire life w/ the other.

In the marriage rite, bride and groom express how one they wish to be, by praying together. That God may make them one heart and one soul. What does this mean? Asking to be made one heart and one soul is therefore the same as asking God to make them (bride and groom) inseparable by giving them, as it were, only one life between the 2 of them.

Think also of the love in community, a picture of the early church in the Acts of the apostles. “See, how they love one another!”

What is a wish and prayer for bride and groom, is a reality in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable. Love binds them so closely together. That they have really only one life between them, and that one life makes them one God, although they are 3 distinct personalities.

## **TO LOVE IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD**

The Bible tells us that we are created in the likeness of God. We shall be our true selves only to the extent that we reflect in our person and in our life who God is. God is love. We shall therefore be ourselves, and find fulfillment in our life, if we begin to love as God loves. The Father, who is the source of life, loves creatively, and He loves all that he has made. Jesus has shown in his life that God's love is a giving, selfless love. A love that finds fulfillment in making the other be and be happy. The Holy Spirit. makes us experience the love of the Father

and of the Son and enflames our heart so that we can respond to that love and become its instrument. (end of Fr. Fermin' thoughts).

St. Augustine, in speaking of the Trinity as love expresses it thus: "THREE: he who loves, he who is loved, the Love" What are the implications in THE GOD OF LOVE, the Trinity in our COMMUNITY LIFE? How is the Bl. Trinity a model of human community? What about our community, the Priory, the congregation? Our country and us? In a country of such great inequality and poverty like ours, how do I express God's love concretely and effectively?

The notion of shared love, as we see it in the Trinity, and as opposed to exclusive, romantic love fits in with Pope Benedict's explanation of "agape" in *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) where he quotes Augustine "If you see charity, you see the Trinity." Randal says "I suppose a sort of converse of this statement is also true: "If you want to love, look at the Trinity". (*reflections posted by F. Randal on www. Yahoo. blog. On "Logic of Love"*).

### **XIII. THE CHALLENGE OF TRINITY SUNDAY**

In conclusion, what now is the challenge of this, our monthly Renewal Day? Love? Unity? Equality? Community? Which other qualities do you see mirrored in the Bl. Trinity which challenge you in your personal life? Every Station Day is like hearing again *Invitatory # 9* at Lauds "Today if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (*RB Prol. 10; Ps 95:8*). Each month is an invitation to listen and to open our hearts to choose God all over again. It's all about choice. Will I open up to God's grace to recognize the power within us, the power to love and radiate that "Trinitarian life" to all? The Bl. Trinity is the great "Life force" which can connect me anew with my community and all of humankind. How do I affirm anew my choice of this God of love in my life? How do I live my vocation which is a personal bond of love with God, "in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit?"

### **THE BLESSED TRINITY, Jubilee Year 2000 Theme**

In the Great Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II composed a prayer in honor of the Bl. Trinity which was the theme and focus of a sacred *Triduum* (three-year preparation) for the celebration of the special event in the entire universal Church. One year was dedicated to each person of the Bl. Trinity for our reflection, prayer and study.

Here is an excerpt of the long Jubilee prayer with a total of 7 stanzas:

*"Blessed are you, **Father**  
Who, in your infinite love,  
gave us your only-begotten **Son**  
born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago*

***Father**, by the power of the **Spirit**  
strengthen the Church's commitment....  
To proclaim **Christ** by our lives ...  
(*Leaflet, Catholic Book Center*)*

## Questions for reflection

Take any of the questions which run through the article. Or you could choose any of the following:

1. Share any insights you have on any of the readings of Trinity Sunday.
2. Who is God for me in my life? How do you know that God loves you?
3. How do I put into practice the communion of love, unity and equality within the Triune God in the next month?

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## A MEDITATION ON THE TRINITY ICON

(Attachment to Sr. Pia Lansang's Article, "Liturgical Reflections...")

**The Christ  
(Middle)**



**The Father  
(Left)**

**The Spirit  
(Right)**

Many scholars consider Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* Icon (ca. 1410-20) found in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow as the most perfect of all Russian icons and, perhaps, the most perfect of all the icons ever painted. The work was created for the Abbot of the Trinity Monastery, Nikon of Radonezh, a disciple of the famous Sergius, one of the leaders of the monastic revival in the 14th-century Russia. It is sometimes called the icon of the Old Testament Trinity. The image is full of symbolism - designed to take the viewer into the Mystery of the Trinity. First, the three faces are identical. How might this help us to understand the nature of the Trinity?

### THE BLUE COLOR IN THE GARMENTS

All the figures wear a blue color in their garment - the color of the heavens, but each wears something that speaks of their own identity. A blue robe speaks of divinity -- A green robe represents new life.

**The Spirit – (right of picture):** The Spirit touches the table - *earthing* the divine life of God. "Lord, You are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness. Let Your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy...." Behind the figure is a mountain. Mountains are places where people often encountered God -- places where heaven and earth seem to touch. Moses met God on mountains. Jesus was transfigured while in prayer on a mountain.

### **The Christ (center of picture)**

The figure wears the *blue* of divinity. The brown garment speaks of the earth - - of Christ's humanity. The gold stripe speaks of kingship. The Christ figure rests two fingers on the table - laying onto it His divine and His human nature. He points to a cup filled with wine. Behind the figure is a tree. This could be the oak tree at Mamre under which the three angelic visitors of Abraham rested (Gen 18, the basis of the icon). The tree may also represent the Cross -- the tree on which our Saviour died: the tree of death which becomes the tree of eternal life which was lost to humanity by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. This was restored to us by the obedience of Jesus. What is the promise here waiting to be fulfilled? The Christ figure inclines towards the figure on the left and we are drawn to gaze there too.

### **The Father (left of picture)**

A figure at rest within Itself. The *blue* garment is almost hidden by a shimmering ethereal robe -- the One who is Creator who cannot be seen by His human creatures. Both hands clasp the staff. All authority in heaven and on earth belong to the Father. Behind the figure is a house-- the dwelling place of God. "In my Father's House are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. What is the promise for you in these words of Jesus? "Those who love me will keep my word and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them".

## **AS SEEN BY THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

Since centuries, as seen by the Eastern Churches, the Christian tradition has contemplated the mystery of Trinity in this famous Rublev's Icon which portrays the three angels invited to table by Abraham.

## **TRINITY ICON: AN INTUITIVE APPROACH TO GOD'S PATERNITY**

The truth of it is found in the showing of hospitality, as Louis Massignon used to say. In inviting the poor to our table, it is Christ that we actually receive. Rublev's Icon of the Trinity, which illustrates a scene of hospitality, presents in an original fashion, an **intuitive approach to the mystery of the paternity of God**. Sometimes, the artists more than the theologians have clearer flashes of intuition. Art is capable of putting into music a unique note with unbeatable eloquence. And an image is worth more than a thousand words. The matching of colors and the vivacity of the looks make of Rublev's icon more than just a piece of art which would illustrate the mystery of hospitality. The Icon introduces us to the threshold of the mystery of God.

Rublev's genius allows the painter to go beyond the constraints of theological theme. His icon is a special kind of challenge to the anti-trinitarians. Instead of forcing them to accept the dogma, Rublev softly and gently tries to bring them to the dogmatic understanding of the icon's meaning.

Rublev is an artist of intense silence. After many years of meditation on the Bible, his world has been laden with symbols. The Bible records that Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent, under the Oak of Mamre (Genesis, 18: 1-8). He saw three men passing and he prostrated himself in front of them and invited them to have a rest and take some food. "My Lord", he says in the singular, as if he had seen God in their covered faces. Augustine comments: He saw three and adored one.

## **THREE PERSONAGES, ONE LORD**

The three personages were accommodated, but they were for Abraham one Lord (“my Lord”). Very early, the Church saw in this scene, a prophetic announcement of the Trinity. The Father looks at the angel on the right, whose green cloak anticipates the resurrection. The third angel symbolizes the living Spirit in which the Father will resurrect Christ and will communicate life to the world. His blue clothes is the expression of wisdom, while his green cloak expressed the human nature evoked at rebirth. The angel which embodies the power of God expresses also his unchangeable youthfulness. The living water of the Spirit which gushed out from the rock is capable of renewing the world. The angel points the finger beside the cup, because it is by the power of the Spirit that the wine is transformed into the blood of Christ.

### **THE “CIRCULAR LOOK”: A PEACEFUL COMMUNICATION OF LOVE**

A peaceful communication of love passes by the looks of the three personages. The circular look created a movement of unity among them. A subtle game of graph among themselves underlines the fact that this harmony consists in the divine communion which reflects the hospitality of Abraham. Furthermore, the looks express the self-emptying of God who reveals himself. All the Trinity is self-emptying: the Father gives himself to his Son, the Son humbles himself and the Spirit is the humility of God.

### **THE WORLD / THE “EUCHARISTIC CUP”**

On the table is the dish offered by Abraham to his guests and which resembles the Eucharistic cup. Under it is a little rectangle which symbolizes the world with its four corners, the world that cannot subsist without the sacrifice of the lamb. Without the Paschal, the suffering of the world is absurd. The blood of the lamb takes away the sin of the world. The space of the table left free by the angels sidesteps the foot of a cup. It is easy to continue to trace the cup which rejoins the shoulders of the angel on the right and of the angel on the left. It is as if a big cup, bounded by the angels on the right and left, drew itself at the centre of that table. The cup of blessing is given to men because the son has drunk the cup of the will of the Father. Humanity is invited to drink the wine of the feast, to accept God’s hospitality.

### **CONTEMPLATING THE ICON**

The contemplation of the Rublev’s Icon of the Trinity indicates the path to follow in deepening the mystery of the Father which is inseparable from that of the Son and of the Spirit. It is the Old Testament that communicates the first announcement of the mystery of the Father. Its Jewish reading enables one to verify how Jesus himself and the Evangelists have read the word of God. For Jesus remained anchored in the tradition of his people. It is the heritage of the great monotheistic tradition which had celebrated the paternity of God. The exegesis made by Jesus himself carries the great novelty: “I and the Father are one”. It is Christ who can successfully reveal the secrets of the paternity of God.

### **GOD EMBRACING THE WHOLE EARTH**

We retrieve the serene circulation of love characterising Rublev’s Icon which envelops the whole history of the Church. The tenderness of the Father and his ineffable proximity embracing the whole earth continue even today, to give the Eucharistic Manna and the water of the Spirit. The

contemplation of the icon of the Trinity is therefore, transformed into a meditation on the whole history of salvation. It finds here its completion in the mystery of the Father, of the Son and the Spirit.

## **THE TRINITY ICON AND THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL SITUATION**

As early as in the 14th century, the popularity of the cult of the Trinity was not based only on its theological content but also on its relationship to the concrete situation in Russian political and social history. It was a time of constant feudal wars that undermined the weak economy of Russian principalities. The best minds of the time (for instance, St. Sergius of Radonezh) understood that feudal quarrels are the greatest evil because they weaken Russia and make it an easy prey for its enemies. For that reason they tried to end the wars and free Russia from the Mongol yoke at any cost. In the idea of the Trinity they found the criticism of the feudal divisions and the Mongol yoke as well as an encouragement to "collect" the divided lands and become free.

## **HENRI NOUWEN ON THE TRINITY ICON**

This last, important interpretation is beautifully supported by the words of Henri Nouwen: "Andrew Rublev painted this icon not only to share the fruits of his own meditation on the mystery of the Holy Trinity but also to offer his fellow monks a way to keep their hearts centered in God while living in the midst of political unrest. The more we look at this holy image with the eyes of faith, the more we come to realize that it is painted not as a lovely decoration for a convent church, nor as a helpful explanation of a difficult doctrine, but as a holy place to enter and stay within. As we place ourselves in front of the icon in prayer, we come to experience a gentle invitation to participate in the intimate conversation that is taking place among the three divine angels and to join them around the table. The movement from the Father toward the Son and the movement of both Son and Spirit toward the Father become a movement in which the one who prays is lifted up and held secure."

## **TRINITY AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORLD**

"Through the contemplation of this icon we come to see with our inner eyes that all engagements in this world can bear fruit only when they take place within this divine circle. The words of the psalm, "The sparrow has found its home at last. . . . Happy are those who live in your house" (Ps 84: 3,4) are given new depth and new breadth; they become words revealing the possibility of being in the world without being of it. We can be involved in struggles for justice and in actions for peace. We can be part of the ambiguities of family and community life. We can study, teach, write and hold a regular job. We can do all of this without ever having to leave the house of love. . . . Rublev's icon gives us a glimpse of the house of perfect love" ([Nouwen](#) 20-22). [A.B.]

Adapted and condensed; headings added to Frédéric Manns Meditation <http://www.christusrex.com/www1/ofm/pope>; Explanation to The Holy Trinity Icon of Andrei Rublev, Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, ca. 1410-20

# Trajectories of Renewal in Religious Life and Mission

Lode L. Wostyn, CICM

At the time of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1991), the Commission on the Religious of which I was a member, presented a paper on the trajectories of renewal in religious life. The situation of the religious has been changing very fast, and I believe that what was written at that time needs to be reformulated in the light of the changes that happened in the world and the Church in recent decades. As religious missionaries, we live our life and bring our message in the context of the contemporary world. This world is in the process of being transformed through the complex phenomenon of globalization. The main force of change is certainly the development of a global economy. But globalization is also manifested in other aspects of our lives in society: politics, science and technology, means of communication, education, plurality of religions, mobility, and so on. The underlying ideologies that give meaning to our changing world are also in transition: the “rational” ideologies of modernity are replaced by a postmodern cacophony of ideas and visions that somehow try to express the human search for something unreachable, truth.

This short introduction would need an elaboration. It can be found in an article. I wrote earlier, and in the hundreds of studies that have been written on globalization and postmodernism. The changes in our world have deeply affected the traditional inner working of the Church. The Church is in turmoil. Its whole hierarchical structure is questioned. New issues ask for a resolution: male-celibate priesthood, the emancipation of the laity, the role of women, the decline of churchgoers, the rejection of traditional morality, the search for a “new age” spirituality, and so on. Religious life also seems to evoke more questions than answers. What is the purpose of religious life now “the cheap labour force” of the religious is not needed any longer in countries where the Government took over their services in education, medical care, and social services? Is there still a need for religious life in our time?

Things are changing very fast, and yet, and this is a paradox, “change can only be sustained when the human person sees the direction, when s/he sees some values that direct and define his/her life”. What is its direction? We have to recall the very basic elements of religious and missionary life.

At the heart of religious life is discipleship of Jesus of Nazareth. Religious commit themselves to follow Jesus in a radical way. Yet, do we not have to say the same thing about all Christians? We do. Does the specific character then lie in the acceptance of the evangelical counsels for one’s life? The three important areas of a person’s life: sexuality, power, possessions and use of things, must be consciously organized by all Christians in accordance with the values of the Kingdom. What is then specific? Religious commit themselves to organize their Christian life through the mediation of the three traditional vows within the context of the Church and the Religious Institute. They experience this commitment as a response to the call of God’s Spirit, and their response is accepted by a religious community, involving the Spirit. The three vows are in fact a response to a single reality. Religious profession is the total donation of a person to the love of God, and each of the vows is a dimension of this donation. It is this commitment to God and to God’s Kingdom that is recognized by the Church as a gift of the Spirit, a charism, and, at the same time, a free human act.

Religious life is the total donation of a person to the love of God, experienced as a charisma, a particular gift of the Spirit. This is done through radical discipleship of Jesus. What is at the core of Jesus' life, what defines him? What made Jesus the man he was? The answer is found in the Gospels: Jesus was a man of God – a Spiritual man – he was “possessed” by the experience of God. Throughout the story of Jesus' ministry we meet this constant reminder of the presence of God: his retreat in the desert, his Baptism, his first message in Nazareth, the nights he went to pray, the transfiguration, Gethsemane.

When we reflect on the origin of our religious-missionary life, I believe that all religious, disciples of Jesus, can point to a personal experience of God - a call - as the first and most basic element of their life. At times religious may wonder whether God is really the centre of their life. For me, the centre has certainly been my work, my teaching and my availability as a teacher. And yet, most of the time, I succeeded in putting some time aside to be reminded of what Father Arrupe describes as the absolute priority of God in religious life: “I proclaim the absoluteness of God and the relativity of everything else”. Chittister puts it in the following way: “at the heart of religious life is a single-minded search for God, within the struggle of self to come to wholeness. What is needed is not possession of truth (perfection), but fidelity to a direction. We seek to be passionately alive within the faith, carried forward by a passionate, forgiving, and gracious God”.

A search and experience of God is the most basic element of religious life. A second is community life. Jesus was not a lonely prophet, shouting his message from a rooftop. He was a community man, gathering around him a community by breaking through all the barriers of his society and religion. Everybody who shared with him the dream of the Kingdom was welcome. After his death, community life was continued and when the Church had to serve a large number of people, it was somehow preserved in the development of religious life.

A third basic element is mission. Jesus' disciples participated in the mission to proclaim and to witness to the gift of God's Kingdom. Religious continue to offer their small contribution to bring God's Kingdom closer to all. We will briefly consider the how of this missionary contribution in the second part of my reflection.

## **I. THE TRAJECTORIES OF RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Religious life is based on an experience of God – on community life – and on mission. The way these basic elements have been understood went through considerable changes in the post Vatican II period. I should like to take you along on a pilgrimage, on a road that some of us have walked during and after the Council, opening at the same time some vistas for the future. These new horizons have been described in the books of O'Murchu and some other sources.

My quotations of Vatican II texts have to be qualified. Many critical studies of the Vatican II Documents point out that to a certain extent the Council produced “compromise texts”. A selective reading of Vatican II can present a vision of the Council in terms of a radical renewal, yet an alternative selection throws us back into the pre-Vatican II theology. The reason is simple, when 2,400 Bishops have to arrive at a consensus you may expect compromises. The classical example for ecclesiology is the charismatic, salvation-historical view of the Church in Chapters I and II of *Lumen Gentium*, followed by the hierarchical view of Chapter III. For religious life, the call to holiness is a call to all Christians (Chapters IV to VI). And yet, the

description of the laity in *Lumen Gentium*, n. 31, reaffirms a three-partite division of the Church in Holy Orders (priesthood), Religious State, and Laity. Religious life is a separate state in between clergy and laity. We will not enter into a detailed exegesis of Vatican II texts. In what follows, we make a selection of texts that express the new perspectives introduced by the Council.

***a) A first road, opened by our experience(s) of God: from self-sanctification to becoming a Christian to a lay spirituality***

The first draft of *Lumen Gentium* (abbreviated: *LG*) treats religious life as a superior way of being a Christian. It is a “narrower path”. Lay people try to become Christians in the world. Religious are a step further because they have chosen to abandon the evil world and are on the way towards sanctification, offered to them within the structures of religious life. The call to holiness seems to be the privilege of the religious!

The final draft of *LG* rejects this approach by elaborating on religious life within the context of the call to holiness of the Christian community. Religious life is one way of becoming a Christian. Its structures (the religious vows, Constitutions, spirituality) are vehicles towards an authentic human life. Religious do not “possess” faith and sanctity. They are on the way, together with the whole Christian community, in becoming believers and disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

*Perfectae Caritatis* (abbreviated: *PC*) elaborates this point by putting as the “supreme rule” of religious life, not a law Constitutions but Jesus himself. The basis of religious life is a “following of Christ”. The first issue of all renewal of religious life is authentic “evangelism”. What is needed is a constant re-evangelizing of all our structures. “Since the fundamental norm of the religious life is a following of Christ as proposed by the Gospel, such is to be regarded by all communities as their supreme law” (n. 2, a).

In discussing the evangelical counsels, *PC* refers each time to: “in imitation of Christ” (nn. 12-14).

What are the more recent additions to this new vision on religious life? A first one, not mentioned on your roadmap, is the fleshing out of what it means to follow Jesus. After the Council, we had plenty of books on the Church. This shifted in the 1980’s. Theology, exegesis and spirituality focused on rediscovering the historical man of Nazareth. We cannot follow an angel – or God – or the second person of the Trinity. We are humans, and hence we can only follow a fellow human. We, however, lost Jesus in the theological speculations of Christology. We need to reconnect with the Master of Nazareth, a human being like us, who became fully human through struggle, making mistakes, connecting with others, discovering friendship, and so on.

“Jesus of Nazareth is the most forgotten person among the very people who claim to be his disciples. He lies buried under the weight of accumulated layers of rituals, rubrics, laws, concepts, legends, myths, superstitions, and institutions. He lies bound hand and foot by innumerable cords that tradition has cast around him. His voice is smothered, his spirit stifled. If he still acts and makes his presence felt in history, it is less through the Official Church than through the honest dissenters among Christians. Therefore, it is the duty of all who cherish the

vision and hope of Jesus to set him free from the prison house of cult, dogma, and institutionalism so that he can freely go about pointing, as of old, his accusing finger at the scribes, Pharisees, Elders, priests, and the Herods of today. To this end it is necessary to remove the many veils that historically conditioned faith and tradition have put on him, and let his visage shine forth in its original splendour and his words ring out in their untamed incisiveness” (Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977).

A second new vista is the stress that as religious, we are “lay”. We have to reclaim our lay-identity, refusing to be apart or to somehow belong to an exclusive club, the clerical family. “Clericalism is the original sin of the Church”. Religious belong to the club and have to cover up for one another. The result of such an attitude has been the sex scandals in the U.S. in which many male religious were involved. Our mission as religious does not just belong to the Church but to the world. We are Christians who seek to collaborate with people in engaging the challenges, offered by our contemporary, globalized planet. We are not only accountable to the Church. We belong to the whole community. The search of some religious groups to incorporate lay people in their communities and endeavours is based on this awareness of our lay status.

***b) A Second Road, opened by our experience(s) of God: from a State of Perfection to the awareness that we received a divine gift, a charism, and moving further on to the partly unexplored road of liminality***

Religious Orders and Institutes in the past had the tendency to separate themselves from the main body of the faithful because they believed that they lived in a State, which was essentially superior to the married State. Religious were on the road towards perfection. This is a very dangerous path. Perfect people make other people into martyrs! I already showed that Vatican II corrected the idea of “a superior state” by seeing religious life as a form of discipleship, a form of being a Christian. The reaction against the idea of “perfection” adds a second perspective. Religious life is placed back within the Church’s mission with its many charisms and ministries. The Council wavered between two visions of the Church: the static, legalistic vision of the Church as a hierarchical society *versus* a salvation historical perspective, seeing the Church as a charismatic community. Hierarchy certainly does not belong to the New Testament understanding of the Church. Saint Paul sees the Church as a body, functioning as a harmonious whole because of the many ministries and charisms, gifts of the Spirit (See: I Cor 12). *LG* follows the Pauline vision when it describes religious life as a “charism”, a gift of the Spirit, to “forward the saving mission of the Church” (n. 43). *PC* puts it in the following way: “these Christians spend themselves ever increasingly for Christ, and for his body, the Church” (n. 1). This charism of the religious has to be understood within the total life of the Church with its many charisms: being a missionary, a proclaimer, a healer, a leader, a teacher, and so many more.

In recent reflections on religious life, a new perspective has been added by stressing the liminality of God’s call to religion. O’Murchu has many pages on the theme of liminality in religious life. I highlight some of them. The word “liminality” itself is new in the vocabulary of religious life. Prophetic is the nearest to it, but liminality brings out much stronger that the whole of religious life should be situated at a threshold, at the cutting edge, inviting people to make the jump to enter into a new state. Liminality is a vocation that is called for by the whole human community because it constantly needs liminal witnesses for its health and growth. All human communities need people to live in a counter-cultural way, radiating values that challenge human

relationships, and call people to grow into the fullness of life. The vows, when lived in a radical way, send us to that “liminal edge” where the three basic values of human life are challenged: power, sexuality, and possessions.

Liminal witness is untidy by its very nature. What makes it authentic is not the development of neat, clean procedures, carved out in the prayerful and orderly culture of the monastery or convent, but the messy process, the engaging struggle, to make sense of reality amid the challenges and confusion of our daily lives in a fast-changing world. A search to live values cannot be caught in clear-cut laws, but through dialogue and mutual exploration, discerning how best to apply a particular set of values in a particular context. Authorities, both secular and religions, are quick to denounce a liminal witness, as somebody capitulating to relativism where effectively anything goes.

Let me give an example from my own context. Theologians in the 1980’s and 90’s, who invited Christians to rediscover the historical Jesus and stressed Jesus’ revolutionary political stance got into trouble with Church authorities. The day before his election, Pope Benedict, warned in his sermon at the opening of the Conclave, that the Church was threatened by relativism. Indeed, it feels so much safer to have a *Catechism* with statements we can learn by heart, even if we do not understand them. The latest theologian victimized by Rome is the Jesuit Jon Sobrino who narrowly escaped martyrdom in San Salvador 20 years ago.

Liminality is untidy for a neatly organized Church and for a religious life, safely entrenched in laws and regulations. It is untidy because the God of the Bible herself is an untidy God. He/She is a God of surprises who so often is met, not in the law and the Temple, but outside, in the suffering, untidy neighbour at the side of the road.

***c) A third road, opened by the search for community life, leads us from the holy rule, binding together a community to a process of refounding, to the birth of a new sense and new forms of community and communion***

In the pre-Vatican II vision of religious life, the charism of the Founder and the particular rule of a religious Institute have often been turned into absolutes. In fact, although the Gospel was nominally accepted as the ultimate norm of religious life, the Founder became the ultimate criterion for vision-mission statements. At the time of the Council, Rome or local bishops had to intervene in situations where the holy rule was invoked to continue some practices that were almost unchristian, e.g. practices of self-mortification and total isolation. In Europe, there was a religious Order that took care of the lepers. No leper was around, but the Order continued to restate its charism. Many religious somehow absolutize the spirituality of their Founder, when in fact this spirituality is determined by a time-bound theology, by particular devotions that existed in European countries in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, by a Jansenist morality, and so on.

*Lumen Gentium* gives us a general framework for the renewal of our Constitutions. Religious are part of the wider Church, a Church on pilgrimage, holy and sinful, always in need of conversion and renewal. This Church and its religious have the Bible and Jesus of Nazareth as “the” reference point for renewal. *PC* then presents a few principles for the renewal. N. 2 encourages religious Institutes to keep the heritage of the Founder, yet at the same time, to have an awareness of contemporary human conditions and of the needs of Church and world. N. 3 goes on by telling religious to renew the different aspects of their life: “The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted to the physical and psychological conditions of today’s

religious and also, to the extent required by the nature of each community, to the needs of the apostolate, the requirements of a given culture, the social and economic circumstances anywhere, but especially in missionary territories”.

In recent years, we have become more strongly aware that our renewal of Church and religious life got struck halfway. What we need is much more than renewal. We need a refounding to incarnate religious life in “a new world that is being born”. In the past, community signaled stability and conformity. This kind of community has made way for various experiments. First, there is a new sense of what community life could signify for its members. A community could become a place where religious develop and nourish friendship. Both psychology and spirituality in our time emphasize the relational dimension of human and spiritual growth. Second, the exploration of the relational dimension of religious life is not possible without being open to different kinds of arrangements towards community living: associational arrangements, intentional communities consisting of religious and lay people united around a shared ministry, single living with regular sharing of life at weekends and so on. Finally communities developed o have to develop more egalitarian forms of leadership, supported by communal discernment. This will be further explored in the next trajectory. The decision to stop all experimentation, taken by Rome in the 1980’s, may have come too early in a world that is immersed in discovering new possibilities of living and relating.

*to be continued...*