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## EDITORIAL

*The first two articles of this issue are two conferences given at a SEDOS seminar on the eve of the Synod on Religious Life.*

*Father HERMANN SCHALÜCK, OFM., Superior General, offers us a challenging reflection on our common identity as religious men and women. After an overview of Religious Life and mission in history, Father Schalück shares with us how he sees the renewal of religious life in relation to our mission "Ad Gentes" and the demands that this renewal will have in our lives.*

*In her conference FRANCE DELCOURT, S.A., reflects on the changes and transformation that Europe is experiencing and the impact that these changes have on the Church. Economic transformation, a changing society, a multi-cultural and multi-religious world in evolution are some of the challenges that European religious men and women experience today.*

*CYPRIEN MBUKA, CICM., reviews in short the results of the African Synod and offers us his own personal impressions. In his conclusion he calls the Synod a Synod of hope for the local churches if its orientations are carried out in practice.*

*DORIS GOTTEMOELLER, RSM., addresses in her conferences two important questions, the question of our ecclesial identity and of our mission in the post-modern world. She characterises apostolic women religious as "laywomen who have embraced and publicly committed themselves to a distinctive way of following Christ". She also addresses some key points such as the value of membership in the Church for apostolic religious women and the meaning and importance of corporate mission.*

### Symposium Publication

#### "AFRICA - KAIROS OF SYNOD"

*The book of 190 pages is ready. - All the major conferences and some of the panels given at the Symposium on the African Synod (April/May 1994) are published in their original languages, French and English.*

#### An order sheet is in this Bulletin

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### NEW BOOKS

Perli, F. / Albanese, G.:  
*Scrivo a voi giovani*  
*Provocazioni missionarie*  
EMI, Bologna, 1994

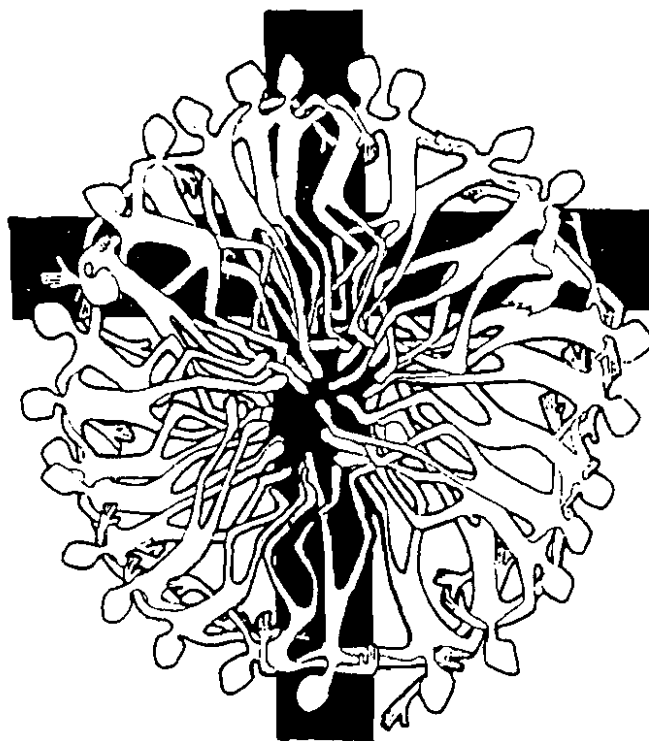
Sanon, A. / Monsignore Pasinya:  
*L'Africa dopo il Sinodo*  
EMI, Bologna, 1994

Tong, E. / Wiest, J.P.:  
*The Catholic Church in Modern China*  
Orbis Books, 1993

Goudzwaard, B. / de Lange, H.:  
*Beyond Poverty and Affluence*  
*Toward an Economy of Care*  
WCC, Geneva, 1994

Brown, Stuart E.:  
*The Nearest in Affection*  
*Towards a Christian*  
*Understanding of Islam*  
WCC, Geneva, 1994

Van Straelen, Henry:  
*L'Église et les religions*  
*non Chrétiennes*  
Beauchesne, 1994



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# OUR IDENTITY IS MISSION

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Brother Hermann Schalück, O.F.M.

*(Brother Hermann Schalück, O.F.M., is Minister General, of the Order of Friars Minor. This conference was given on 30 September, 1994, at the SEDOS Seminar on The Renewal of Religious Life and Our Mission "Ad Gentes").*

## INTRODUCTION

My brothers and sisters, it is good to be here together on the eve of the synod on religious life and to reflect on some of the important common issues related to our identities as religious men and women in a rapidly changing world.

Our discussion is at a opportune moment. Some of the challenges that we discuss within our individual communities we can now share together with other brothers and sisters who are dealing with similar concerns. In my presentation it is not my intention to give a privileged place to one or the other tradition in Religious Life. I rather think that there are some common elements which prompt us to rethink, redefine and possibly "re-invent" the dimension of missions and especially of mission "*Ad Gentes*" as a constitutive part of Religious Life in general. With the ever increasing insight of missiology, anthropology, ecclesiology, and other social sciences there is additional clarity and confusion about our "mission" as religious.

## PREMISES

I want to share with you some of my premises.

**First**, it is obvious that there is a tremendous diversity in the expressions of Religious Life within the Church. Each community has its own particular mission growing out of belief in Jesus Christ the Incarnation of God's love. The diversity of religious Life is shaped by the personality, charism and spirituality of the community's founder and the community's response to the Church's and social needs throughout the community's history. In a homely image it is

fair to say that each community is like a particular plant or type of flower in a vast garden. Some plants are medicinal, some plants are savory, some plants produce food, some plants seem to be serene in their quite reflective beauty. All are planted or missioned by God, each for a particular purpose.

**My second premise** is that not all religious communities are intended to live forever. To continue the image of flowers in a garden, some communities have a perennial life, many are annuals. The death of a community is probably a sign that this particular community has fulfilled its purpose. The death of a community is not a negative sign of failure.

**A third premise** is that it is especially during periods of historic transition that new religious communities are born while others are forced to adapt and still others die. An indicator of a historic transition is the major change in a society's assumptions and interpretation of its experience of life.

**A fourth premise.** I believe that we are now living in a period of major global transition, that we are in an "in-between-time". (Sean Sammons) The changes are evident in the migrations of so many peoples, the access to global communications, the different popular revolutions and movements: political, sexual, biological, genetic research, religious fanaticism, and interdependent global economies. The changes are happening not only in individual societies at the local level but they are simultaneously influencing life and society at the global level. This global shift has ramifications for future Religious Life and our "*mission Ad Gentes*".

## OVERVIEW OF RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSION IN HISTORY

From its very beginning Religious Life appears as the Incarnation of God's radical love for his world, as a sign of the radicalness of the Gospel and as a liberating force transforming the world. It is worth remarking that, from its first appearances, Religious Life was not defined as an expression of the pastoral or charitable activity of the Church, but rather as a visible and legible sign of what it means to be Church-at-the service of the world. Evangelisation "*Ad Gentes*", often with its dark and bright sides, has been the work mainly of the Religious, both men and women, lay and clerics.

### Early Church

In terms of participation or mission there were distinct group among the followers of Jesus: the large crowds to whom he preached and fed, the people whom he healed, the 70 disciples, the 12 apostles, and the 3 closest friends, Peter, James and John. After Jesus' death and resurrection the Community's mission was among the Jewish people and grew "*Ad Gentes*" to include the Gentiles. Eventually, there were groups within the community identified by certain gifts, ministries, or common concerns. There were administrators, prophets, widows, deacons, teachers, and apostles. The Christian community for the next two centuries was preoccupied with celebration of its mysteries, its quiet growth and its survival among intermittent periods of persecution.

### Hermetical Life

In the fourth century the Emperor Constantine and his family converted to Christianity and they brought the Roman Empire itself into the Church. The Church had the mission of implementing the petition of the Lord's Prayer that God's Reign "come on earth as it is in heaven". The whole empire was becoming Christian. There were still areas to be converted. The demons had been forced from the cities, from civilisation and into the wilderness. Holy men and women left villages, farms, families and friends to go into the desert to live as hermits. There they were lightbearers of the gospel in the desert combatting the forces of darkness. The glorious return of Jesus seemed to be contingent on the ability of the Church to clear a path for him. The Christian community had the mission inward, to the peoples of the cities of the empire and "*Ad Extra*" out into the wilderness.

### Monastic Life

Over the next two centuries as the Roman Empire was collapsing groups of these desert hermits gathered together in associations with certain of these holy men/women who became their mentors and teachers. In time these associations became more structured and served as the base for monastic life which flowered in the Rules of Saint Basil in the East and of Saint Benedict in the West. It was a time of uncertainty and the monastic communities became islands of security and culture within the changing maps of western and central Europe. The monasteries kept the record of western civilisation alive while spreading Christianity among the new settlers on the European continent. The Religious Life of the monastic communities provided a stability for the continent in a period of transition. The mission "*Ad Gentes*" could be described as bringing the civility, the law and order of the Reign of God to illiterate, impoverished and often violent people.

### Mendicant Life

By the end of the first millennium of the Christian Era, European society was organised with a strong feudal base. Pockets of merchants and other entrepreneurs began to live independently of the feudal lords in communes and towns. These new businessmen gave birth to a new style of life of distributed wealth in a stable European society. From within this new culture grew mendicant Orders of friars, religious men who were not associated with monasteries but who travelled from village to village preaching messages to convert and comfort the people. The friars' mission was to live the penitential life and to preach the message of God for the conversion of heretics and the encouragement of the faithful.

The wealth of the communes and the middle class grew, universities were established to teach the young. The feudal system collapsed and was replaced by nation states that vied with each other for power and wealth. With the new security and independence a Renaissance opened the way to the education and glorification of the individual person. People learned that the world was not flat, that men could travel across the ocean to new lands. Gold, spices and wealth rewarded the adventurous. The mission "*Ad Gentes*" became a project to Christianise the natives of the New World.

## Apostolic Life

The Church grew wealthier by its association with Catholic colonial powers. There was a strong reaction to the wealth and conduct of the Church. In Northern Europe the Protestant Reformation caught fire and changed the history of western Christianity. Within the Roman Church the Counter Reformation gave rise to many new apostolic communities of men and women who wanted to live a simple evangelical lifestyle while caring for the poor and disadvantaged in their societies as teachers, nurses, preachers and missionaries. Also, it has been a tumultuous period of revolutions (American, French, Russian, Latin American, Colonial; Scientific, Rationalism, Industrial, to name a few), hundreds of wars and the migration of millions of peoples. In academic circles there was a divorce and mutual mistrust between the natural and the spiritual sciences, between religion and psychology. Yet even with persecutions, the periodic ban and dissolution of some religious communities, Religious Life did flourish. There was a strong self-confidence that grew from our defense. We knew who the enemies were and we believed that we were right. Our mission "*Ad Gentes*" was to bring as many people worldwide to the truth, which for us at that time meant, into the Roman Catholic Church.

## TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the first half of this century there were various movements, such as the biblical, ecumenical, catechetical, liturgical and lay apostolates. By the 1950's many communities were sending missionaries abroad, bishops and superiors read the signs of the time and responded by building large novitiates, schools of philosophy and theology to accommodate the many applicants to seminaries and to Religious Life. Then the Church gathered for the Second Vatican Council.

Perhaps the Second Vatican Council was not so much an opening to the future but a summary, an end of a rich period of the Church's history? What if it was the full blossom of a plant that is now entering into autumn and winter?

### Today: The In-Between-Time

Not only have our lifestyles, clothing and prayer life changed over the past thirty years but our civil societies have changed with

incredible speed. Within the Church there have been strong developments in scripture scholarship and theological reflections, as well as an incorporation of the natural and social sciences into our theologies. Our understandings of God, Church and Mission are being affected by these changes.

*For centuries the observation of the sun rising and setting daily on the horizon gave people reason to think that we were the center of the universe and that the sun rotated around us. What began as a casual observation grew into a cosmology, that is, an interpretation of the perception. From this cosmology the Christian Church and western civilisation constructed a complete worldview encompassing God's design for the human race, the need for salvation, worship, law, ethics, iconography, etc. The new perceptions of Galilei were not harmless or mere curious observations. Using a simple new lens Galilei introduced a tremendous shift in the perception of the way humanity understood its place and our solar system within the universe. The experience of the new perception forced the previous cosmology and many of its corollaries to crumble and new ones to take their place. This crisis was not without serious problems. This new information was a tremendous threat to the way Christians had understood God, their world and their place in it. The threat to the cosmological underpinnings of society was so strong that it was not only difficult, but even dangerous, to talk to bishops and to try to convince them to see reality in the new way.*

*Today we are in a similar time of crisis where our cosmological assumptions are changing. Perhaps the new lens that introduced the beginnings of a new cosmology is the lens of the camera through which we saw the earth from the moon. People all through the world have had the common experience of watching other people break the law of gravity, move into space and from the moon watch our planet rotate like a glowing Christmas ornament suspended against a black sky. Together we watched ourselves and our planet, a globe without borders, fragile, alone and brilliant, from a camera that sat on the moon 280,000 miles away.*

Today one half of the human race, the women, are defining themselves and their rights vis-a-vis the other half, the men. This is probably one of the most important discussions in the history of the human family. The world is becoming a global village where more people are

interested in spirituality but do not identify with a religion. As we learn more about creation and electronically meet new brothers and sisters throughout the world our perceptions change. We not only see nature and one another differently but our understanding of God changes. Fewer people are frightened by the concept of God. All religions are seen as good and helpful for people's journey. More spiritualities are creation-centered and identified with the struggles of the poor and human rights. Physicists who were previously considered the enemies of religion are now giving us lectures on how matter and spirit are aspects of the same reality and that the base of all matter is spirit.

For the first time in history the whole global family can now be simultaneously affected by the same experience at the same time. Television has united us around a new village fire. We watch the Russian White House in Moscow being attacked; together hundreds of millions of people from every country in the world gasp at the same instant as we watch the winning goal of the World Cup being scored in Los Angeles. We can Tele-fax across closed borders, over the heads of despots, giving people hope as well as updated data about human rights violations. Access to information shifted power from factory production output to information. Information gives people the possibility to make choices for their lives.

Over the last ten years or so we have witnessing a shift in focus: from an ecclesiocentric and/or exclusively Christocentric model of mission (and also of Religious Life) towards a model which, though thoroughly ecclesial and grounded in true discipleship, is open the horizon of the world to come, of the "new heaven and the new earth", that is of God's Reign. In this way, it is the Reign of God which defines the identity of the Church and which is also bound to re-define Religious Life within the Church. If the identity of the Church is mission, then the Reign of God and its values (peace, justice, divine filiation and human fellowship, unconditional respect for all life, brotherhood/sisterhood of all the nations under one God) become the goal of the mission of the Church.

It seems that contemporary theology has reached a fairly strong consensus about the base for the self-understanding of the Church (also of Religious Life): The center of Jesus' life and ministry was the proclamation of the breaking-in of the Reign of God by words, gestures ("deeds") and especially through his death and

resurrection. Biblical scholars tell us that Jesus' self-understanding consisted in his being the prophet of that new reality which is called the Reign of God. He speaks about a God who relates to every single human being, to the whole of creation, to history in and through which his love will unfold and grow until the end of the times. "The Kingdom of God... is the utopian vision of a society of love, justice, equality, based on the inner transformation or empowerment of human beings. A vision in which people will 'act' and 'live together' differently because they will 'be' and 'feel' themselves differently" (P. Knitter).

Vatican II has placed mission at the very center of the Church's self-understanding: The Church is missionary by its very nature. Mission belongs to the very essence of the Church. One could easily say: The Church's identity is mission. In this perspective mission does not proceed from a special mandate received from some ecclesial authority, but from baptism itself by which every Christian is initiated into that "communio". A "communio" which is not a closed circle, but rather a living body whose nature consists in the act of sharing and self-giving, much the same as Jesus has given himself away for the sake of the "many". In a very clear sense the Church does not exist for itself. It is rather, as *Lumen Gentium* puts it, the "sacrament" of the communion of humankind and of the whole creation with God, the sacrament of God's salvic and liberating plan for his creation.

## MISSION AND REVERSE MISSION

When we speak about "mission", it is easy to look for a project, a book to publish, a tract to write, a film to produce in order to communicate the "content of the message" in order to change others' lives for the better. But "mission" is not the same as a certain amount of measurable information to be communicated, taught or handed over. It is an attitude of being sent to announce by presence and/maybe by word the Reign of God.

Seven hundred eighty years ago at the time of the Crusades our brother, Francis of Assisi, travelled to the east with the intention of preaching to the Sultan, the enemy of his people. If the Sultan would convert then there would be peace. Francis was fortunate because the Sultan was a wise and open man. Rather than be angered by Francis' preaching the Sultan invited him to live in his camp and to

continue their discussions over a period of time. Francis experienced another conversion in his life. He did not become Muslim but he returned to Assisi with a great respect for the "Saracens". He was more deeply evangelised himself than was the Sultan. In the First Rule for our life Francis wrote that the brothers who go among the "Saracens or other unbelievers" should live among these people being "subject to all", quarreling with no one and by their lives give witness to their faith as Christians. If and only when it pleases God should they preach and baptise.

Francis gave us a wonderful model of evangelisation and mission. We go into a situation that is foreign to us and we live respectfully with people as we come to understand their ways. We do not argue with them and we do not attempt to preach until God makes it clear that we should do so.

Mission is thus an attitude, a viewpoint, an enlightenment (Buddha) which allows us to see what is really here: to see, to experience the humble and simple God living among us or better put: we living within God. Mission is choosing to have your eyes opened and to be a witness to the Reign of God where spirit and matter are in harmony. It is to believe and to hope in the Reign of God that is around us, that is beneath the surface of life, that is within each person. It is a chosen attitude, a disposition toward peace and toward justice, desiring to see all as it is intended to be by God. It has the ability to bring out what is hidden, like "the steward who brings treasures from the storeroom". It is a way of seeing and understanding the world and its people with faith in the Incarnation of God's Love. There is a marvelous story about St Ignatius Loyola that describes this attitude of faith. When St Ignatius was an old man living in retirement, often he was seen in the garden walking among the flowers. Every so often he would wobble up to a plant that was in full bloom. He would push his cane up against the flowers and gently shake them saying, "I know, I know, do not shout about it so loudly"!

### **DISCIPLESHIP A BASIC ATTITUDE FOR ALL TIMES**

It was not only the content of Jesus' teaching that captured the apostles' attention. It was also his personal interest in them and his calling power. Calling them to see, to be awake to the Reign of God that was within and around them,

so that they could be free to be their true selves. In Simon, Jesus saw the hidden strength of a great leader underneath the vacillation of a coward who loudly denied knowing him before a servant girl in Herod's courtyard; it was the hidden gentleness of James and John who both wanted to call down the fire and brimstone of Sodom and Gomorhea upon the Samaritan town which would not give them night shelter; it was the hidden loyalty and passionate dedication of Mary Magdalene who was prostituting herself for money; it was the hidden fairness of Zaccheus who promised retribution to all whom he had cheated; it was the hidden integrity within Matthew the apostle and martyr who had been willing to work for the enemy and to collect tax money from his own people. Our mission is to help those who are blind, deaf or indifferent to experience and respond to the Reign of God that is within and around them.

### **Questions**

Dedication to Reign of God will open up many questions about the way we do things when we go about our mission: For example, what would it mean for us as religious to be in China and go to China in the future? What would be the intent of such a mission? The Chinese have the world's oldest continuous civilisation. We believe that God has been loving the Chinese people, living and working among them for thousands of years. So why would we feel called to go live among them? What would we need to tell them? or to ask of them?

What lessons are we learning from our recent experience of evangelisation in Rwanda? In other parts of Africa? What about the feasibility of religious communities becoming active NGO's associated with the United Nations? How could we preach or witness our faith that Christ has died, Christ has risen and that Christ will come again to the United Nations community?

When we implant the Church or our institute in other countries how mobile, flexible and poor are we? How respectful is our attitude towards the culture and ways of our hosts? Do we retain the ownership of structures and of the young local Churches? Is now the time when the "young" Churches developed by our Institutes should now become themselves active in "sending" missionaries? Why are there not more missionaries from Africa, Asia, Latin America? Do we evangelise by our witness to evangelical dignity and equality among our-

selves - lay and clerics, men and women - as we all are bound together by the same fundamental task of evangelisation? Do we export our old problems and divisions to the young Churches?

### Challenges

What about the renewal of Religious Life and our mission "*Ad Gentes*"? Lest we fool ourselves, we need to remember that in nature most renewal is through death. Unless the seed fall to the ground and die it will not produce a grain of wheat. Death opens up the possibility of progress and development, a rebirth to a life that is very different from a prior stage. Maybe we are being prepared for the next planting and like the seed can only believe and hope that the unknown future is within us. Perhaps we are now being pulled into the next period, across the threshold. Often there is resistance whenever creation comes to an evolutionary boundary crossing. New energy is created by the friction caused by the resistance to evolutionary draw forward. This new energy helps to propel creation into its next stage.

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***Religious Life refuses boundaries. More often than not Religious Life defies strict definitions, the naming of structural elements and geographical limitations. Its very nature is dynamic and not static.***

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All of our institutes need to adapt, both those at home and those abroad, to the issues surrounding us: the challenge to form smaller groups of Christians living a gospel inspired life among people who are indifferent, blind or hostile to the Reign of God; learning how to live in international and intercultural communities, not just because of necessity but as a public witness to the solidarity of the human race; working and collaborating together, men with women, women with men; praying and working, on a regular basis, with people of other religions; sharing with the scientific community the message the God has become part of creation; speaking on behalf of those who do not have voice at public meetings such as the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen), the World Conference on Women (Beijing), the World Conference on Habitat (Turkey).

Lessons about the renewal of Religious Life and our mission "*Ad Gentes*" can be learned from our smaller brothers and sisters, hydrogen and oxygen molecules, which even though they are so well defined and useful, often merge and find new life when they lose themselves and become our Sister Water, who St. Francis reminds us is precious, useful, chaste and pure. In water, hydrogen and oxygen have a temporary and useful fulfillment that was undreamt. However, each must change, convert, lose itself in order to unite, to become something new. Earlier in history the message of the Incarnation passed from its Jewish home to the west, in Greece and Rome where there was a fusion between the message from the Orient and the culture of the West. In many ways this exchange or union is similar to the fusion of hydrogen and oxygen to make our gentle Sister Water. A question for us: Are we prepared personally or institutionally to bring the molecule of our world and let it merge completely with another's world so that there will be a new understanding of the Incarnation and its ramifications? For example, what if the West were to bring its world of theology and reflection and let it be transformed and inculturated into the teachings of Confucius so that there would be a Chinese Catholic Church?

Much of Religious Life as we knew it is dying and changing into a new life that is yet unknown, undreamt. For the next century, I believe that there will be various experiences of Religious Life in the Church. Not only will they be diverse but they may be functioning out of different ecclesiologies and in very different social situations. In some countries religious communities will prosper as they did fifty, sixty years ago in the north. In other places even with our best of intentions and efforts, the answer to our prayers will be fewer numbers and even the disappearance of some communities that served the Church very well in the past. It will also draw out the new forms of Religious Life from the Church for the global society, forms which will be consistent with predecessors in the past but different, perhaps as different as a seed compared to a sapling.

Just as the prospering commune of Assisi was the catalyst for the innovation of Francis and Clare, we can expect that our new world will be the catalyst for the new spiritual leaders, the new forms of life publicly dedicated to God. These new forms of "religious" life will respond in fresh and in bold different ways to the challenges that come from evolving global village. They will probably be concerned with



opening the eyes of those who cannot see the obvious parts of the Reign of God.

Attention has to be drawn to the danger of an incorrect reading of the Religious Life, a danger which exists both in the local Churches of the South as in those of the Northern hemisphere: Some consider only the utilitarian aspect and thus relegate to the background the "raison d'être", the fundamental charism of Religious Life, which consists in being a humble, but nevertheless prophetic sign of God's loving presence in the world and in the whole of creation, in being a sign of the living Spirit which gives birth to an ever new incarnation of the Gospel and witnesses to the coming of the Reign of God within the different cultures of the world. I would like to emphasise the fact that in its deepest dimension, Religious Life is not a resource at the service of pastoral ministry. It is rather essentially important in itself, in and through giving witness to God and the transforming power of the Gospel in the Church and in society. "The apostolate of all religious consists primarily in the witness of their consecrated life, which they are bound to foster through prayer and penance" (CIC 673).

The history and the present situation of our Province in the Netherlands and frequent conversations with my brothers there, convince me more and more, that we have to read our history as an Institute with the eyes of faith, in a true and hope-filled perspective of death and resurrection. I think that this is one of the relevant perspectives of "mission and gentes". What I am going to say now will make you perhaps think of similar situations in your own institute and history: Our province in the Netherlands was once the largest province in the Order, with 1.500 members. Now it is down to some 400 friars, and it is easy to imagine that it will become even smaller. But this province has a unique and recent history of sending out many brothers into different countries and cultures. The Dutch friars have been decisively and very generously instrumental in setting up local Churches and new independent and vibrant international provinces of our Order in Brazil, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Korea and Japan. Hundreds of our Dutch friars evangelised and died in these areas. Does the growth that we are proud of today in those countries have the cost of the self-emptying, of dying within the sending province? Yes. Together with my brothers in the Netherlands, I try to look at this evolution, filled with hope that also in Holland religious, Franciscan, life will by no means come to an end. But that it will continue - maybe

with small numbers - but with new energies also received from the young Churches and provinces they have been ministering to.

My question is: Are we open and ready to learn these difficult lessons which history teaches us? My impression is that what prevents us often from being courageous in "reaching out" and "going beyond" is the fear to give away, an understandable, but dangerous reluctance to give up, a sometimes disastrous strategy of "maintenance and "crisis-management" which does not allow for creativity, for visioning, for sending and sharing our resources. I'd also like to add here that in our experience it will be crucial for the missionary character of the whole Church and of our international institutes that the young Churches and the religious Orders serving in them take over the task of "sending" and of reaching out themselves. There should and there could be more missionaries from Africa in Africa; from Latin America in Africa and Asia; from Asia in Asia; and from Asia in Africa. Why does this not happen more visibly and more frequently?

## CONCLUSION:

### SOME SPECIAL CHALLENGES

#### 1. The call to new frontiers

Religious Life refuses boundaries. (Saint Francis: The story of Lady Poverty asking the friars to show her their cells, "Our cloister is the world"). More often than not Religious Life defies strict definitions, the naming of structural elements and geographical limitations. Its very nature is dynamic and not static. Religious Life has often been the primary agent of change within the Church and in society. By its very nature it is a constant pursuit of the "ultimate" in life and history, the continuous search for the fullness of life and of history. It has to do with the urgency for authentic witnessing to the truth that, despite of the many arguing to the contrary, God's love is the agent in history and that Jesus is the Lord: He will return again to inaugurate the fullness of the Reign of God. Religious Life breathes and celebrates that end-time already now. It is thus proclamation, anticipation, and prophecy. Religious Life with its mission "*Ad Gentes*" is a sign of the Reign of God which is part of the dialectic of the 'already' and the 'not yet'.

**I would like to propose some simple questions for your reflection and perhaps your discussion:**

- Are we the presence of the Risen Lord in the world?
- Are we the voice of the poor seeking to be heard in a world which is structurally unjust?
- Are we a cry for justice that is not easily silenced?
- Are we the signs and "sacraments" of a compassionate God?
- Are we the alternative to greed, nationalism, consumerism, racism, upward mobility?
- Are we peacemakers, with peace reigning first of all in our own hearts and in our own Institutes?
- Are we a word of hope, a song of encouragement and hope for those who need courage?
- Are we caretakers of our Mother the Earth?
- Are we the gatherers of the alien, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the migrant, the asylum-seeker, the unemployed, the forgotten?
- Are we a sign of a reconciled Church (the question of being an international Institute..)?
- Are we that special gift to the Church which calls it back to its initial love and discipleship?

## 2. "Passing over"

Jesus' mission was a personal Passover (Kenosis) from what is familiar and secure into a world of sinners, outcasts, the indifferent, the corrupt and the impure. Today, a creative following of Jesus has to contemplate and implement our community's Passover into the lives of the poor, by making our option for the poor a self-emptying into other contexts and other cultures, and inculturation.

3. We speak about the necessity of acting with integrity to **implant a Church which is inculturated** but also one which is international ("Catholic"). It is so important in these days, having the advantage of history and the studies of modern social sciences that we do not act impetuously and blindly. We need to be careful to avoid the danger of incommunicability through a superficial and erroneous concept of inculturation. We also need to be cautious of the danger of a new nationalisms which can hide within the language of inculturation and "respect for cultures". An essential part of our mission "*Ad Gentes*" is to help people avoid being trapped by the destructive elements of tribalism. But before we go to other places to give advice to other brothers and sisters we need to be certain that we have the practice of addressing these same human problems within our institutes.

4. This last point brings me to the challenge that **we evangelise by our witness to the evangelical dignity and equality that we practice among ourselves (Ca 588,1)**. We have continuing historical problems concerning the relationship between lay and clergy, between men and women, and yet all are bound together by the same fundamental task of evangelisation. It is important for us as religious institutes to examine ourselves and to ask if we export our old problems and divisions to the young Churches? Reconciliation must take place among ourselves on a daily basis if we hope to be witnesses of the Reign of God among other nations, tribes, and cultures. The message that we preach by word and deed must be incarnational, that is, it must demonstrate our firm conviction that God takes creation and our societies seriously. Mission "*Ad Gentes*" must include the wisdom and commitment to the struggle of the poor that is contained within the social teachings of the Church. Our work for justice and peace is an integral part of evangelisation. Dialogue is an essential element to our mission "*Ad Gentes*". Dialogue as evidenced in a public manner by the famous encounter of world religions in Assisi eight years ago.

## Conclusion

Sunday morning, on the eve of the Feast of our Brother Francis, the Synod on Religious Life will open and we shall then begin a public discussion of our reflections, or hopes and our fears about the future of Religious Life. Jesus asks that we go out into the whole world and "make disciples of all nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". To submerge ourselves with the whole world into the conscious awareness of the love and life of the Trinity

My prayerful hope is the Synod may be able to clearly focus on the vital questions that are arising from around the world. Also, I hope that all of the different forms and expressions of Religious Life, and not only the Missionary Societies or Missionary Orders, may regain strength, vitality and meaning by recruiting, forming in a missionary spirituality, sending men and women, who are men and women of vision and hope, rooted in contemplation to live and proclaim God's love, brothers and sisters who incarnate the *raison d'être* of the Church of Christ in view of the Reign of God: to be symbols, signs and agents of God's love towards his creation: "Religious are the radicalisation of the Church as mission or movement towards the Reign of God" (M. Amaladoss).

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# L'EUROPE DANS L'AN 2000, NOUVEAU DÉFI MISSIONNAIRE POUR LA VIE RELIGIEUSE

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France Delcourt

*(France Delcourt, S.A., Présidente de l'U.C.E.S.M. (Union des Conférences Européennes de Supérieurs/res majeurs/res). Conférence donnée le 30 septembre 1994 au séminaire du SEDOS sur la mission et la vie religieuse).*

L'Europe qui apparaissait comme un vieux continent, divisé depuis 1945 en 2 blocs EST/OUEST, est soudain remis sur le devant de la scène mondiale depuis 1989-90 avec la chute spectaculaire du bloc soviétique.

"Ainsi cette Europe congelée en deux blocs opposés, avec chacun son système de défense et son marché interne, qui se construisaient toujours en contre-rapport avec l'autre, était en apparence une Europe stable, l'Europe des accords tacites, de partages de pouvoir, de zones d'influence, que les deux antagonistes s'étaient engagés à respecter. C'était la paix froide pour éviter la guerre chaude" (Card. Poupard 21-23 Mai 1994 Congrès à Villa Cagola-Gazzada).

L'effondrement du système communiste laisse émerger en Europe centrale et orientale tous les problèmes et antagonismes ataviques entre peuples et minorités ethniques mis sous le couvercle de régimes dictatoriaux.

Par contre-coup, la situation bouleverse aussi les rapports entre pays occidentaux.

Ainsi "dans une certaine mesure, l'Europe se trouve désormais devant son image réelle. Et c'est à partir de cette situation de fait, qu'il faut envisager concrètement sa construction" (Card. Poupard-id).

Dans ce continent en pleine mutation, comment se situent l'Église et la vie religieuse? Même si ce fut de manière différente, dans

l'ensemble, la FOI a été partout mise à l'épreuve, à l'EST comme à l'OUEST..

Continent le premier évangélisé, il est devenu celui des vieilles Églises, face aux nouveaux pôles de développement dans l'hémisphère SUD..

Devant les difficultés de l'annonce de la BONNE NOUVELLE à un continent qui semble ne pas avoir soif de Dieu, la tentation est grande de rejoindre les jeunes Églises qui manquent tellement d'ouvriers.

Et pourtant, il serait irresponsable de désertier ces lieux désormais arides, mais où se jouent des enjeux de dimension planétaire, et où s'affrontent la FOI et une MODERNITÉ qui, progressivement, va envahir le monde entier.

Ainsi, au moment même où la vie religieuse apostolique européenne traverse une phase de fragilité (peu de recrutement, vieillissement des membres) elle est spécialement invitée à un nouvel élan face aux enjeux que soulève la construction de la nouvelle Europe. [Remarque: si 50% sont âgés de plus de 65 ans, les religieux/ses européens représentent près de la moitié de l'effectif mondial ce qui avec leur capital de formation signifie de réelles potentialités à ré-investir sans doute d'une autre manière que par le passé]

Sans vouloir tout traiter, nous allons parcourir quelques unes des situations qui interpellent particulièrement les religieux/ses qui vivent en Europe.













**PASTORALE DES CEY COMME LIEU  
D'UNE EVANGELISATION  
EN PROFONDEUR**

L'ecclésiologie de l'Eglise-Famille se con-  
crétise à travers les communautés chrétiennes à  
taille humaine: les Communautés ecclésiales  
vivantes. Recommandées déjà par les évêques  
d'Afrique au Synode de 1974, elles se réalisent  
déjà dans plusieurs endroits et portent des  
fruits. Le Synode demande que la pastorale de  
ces communautés soit renforcée.

Enracinées dans le terroir, ces communautés  
ont une ouverture sur le monde, une attention  
vive à ses défis et une motivation pour les  
affronter. La conversion, en effet, est une  
exigence de témoignage et d'engagement à la  
fois personnels et communautaires. La famille  
chrétienne, justement appelée *Eglise domestique*  
sera témoin du Christ au cœur de la grande  
famille africaine (cf. *Message*, n°27). Les  
mouvements d'apostolat des familles seront  
promus; la famille sera protégée contre les idées  
individualistes et permissives (cf. *Message*,  
n°29).

**DONNER LA VOIX AUX SANS-VOIX  
ET LIBERER LES LIBERTES**

En Afrique, les régimes totalitaires bafouent  
impunément les droits et la dignité de l'homme.  
Des populations sont brimées et réduites au  
silence. L'Eglise-Famille porte en elle le souci  
de tous, car tous sont appelés à former une  
même famille dans le Christ; elle a un rôle  
prophétique et elle est la voix des sans-voix.  
Les Eglises d'Afrique n'ont pas manqué de  
dénoncer ceux et celles (et les structures) qui  
réduisent leurs frères et soeurs au silence, ceux  
et celles (et les structures) qui enchaînent les  
libertés de leurs frères et soeurs. Mais la situa-  
tion n'a guère changé. Le Synode réitère ces  
dénonciations: "les agresseurs, affirme-t-il,  
auront à répondre devant Dieu de tout acte de  
violence contre des vies innocentes" (cf. *Mes-  
sage*, n°35).

L'Etat de droit est une urgence; il est le seul  
à garantir les droits des citoyens (cf. *Message*,  
n°34 et 36). L'Eglise contribuera au processus  
de démocratisation des pays dans la mesure où  
elle favorise la participation des citoyens à la  
chose publique. "La démocratie doit devenir  
l'une des routes principales sur lesquelles  
l'Eglise chemine avec le peuple" (cf. *Message*,  
n°34). Les Commissions *Justice et Paix* veille-  
ront les communautés chrétiennes à leur

responsabilité en faveur de la justice et de la  
paix, et pour la défense des droits humains. Les  
médias ont un rôle très important dans la con-  
scientisation des gens sur les questions de jus-  
tice et paix. C'est un devoir pour les Eglises de  
développer les médias au niveau diocésain,  
régional et continental, de soutenir et de  
promouvoir la créativité de ceux qui y sont  
engagés. Pour répondre à leur objectif, qui est  
d'être au service du peuple, les médias officiels  
doivent être accessibles à toutes les composantes  
du peuple sans exclusive.

Parmi les sans-voix et les sans-liberté en  
Afrique il faut certainement compter les  
*réfugiés et les déplacés*. "Le Synode dénonce et  
condamne énergiquement toutes les volontés de  
puissance et toutes sortes d'intérêts ainsi que  
l'idolâtrie de l'ethnie qui conduisent aux guerres  
fratricides: elles valent à l'Afrique la honte  
d'être le continent où se trouve le plus grand  
nombre de réfugiés et de déplacés" (cf. *Mes-  
sage*, n°36). Le Synode demande aux chrétiens  
du Nord d'interpeller ceux qui vendent les  
armes aux Africains afin de faire cesser ce com-  
merce de la mort (cf. *Message*, n°40). Les  
Eglises d'Afrique intensifieront leur sollicitude  
à l'égard des réfugiés et des déplacés; elles  
s'adonneront à de sérieuses analyses des causes  
de ce fléau et auront le courage de démasquer  
les vrais coupables. Les Conférences épis-  
copales n'hésiteront pas à se prononcer publi-  
quement et à agir ensemble pour défendre la  
cause des faibles. Les *Africains émigrés dans  
les pays du Nord* constituent aussi une préoc-  
cupation: le Synode souhaite qu'ils soient  
respectés (cf. *Message*, n°41). La *déforestation  
et la pollution industrielles* dont l'Afrique est de  
plus en plus victime est dénoncée. L'action  
pastorale et scolaire de l'Eglise devra inculquer  
le souci pour l'environnement et le respect de la  
création.

*Les femmes* jouent un rôle important dans  
l'Eglise et dans la société. Les discriminations  
dont elles sont victimes aussi bien dans l'Eglise  
que dans la société doivent être dénoncées. Il  
est temps qu'elles accèdent aux instances où se  
prennent les décisions. On établira des mini-  
stères ecclésiastiques pour elles. *Les jeunes*  
représentent plus de la moitié du continent  
africain; ils sont la source de dynamisme et de  
renouvellement de ce continent (cf. *Message*,  
n°62). Les Eglises et les dirigeants des pays  
intensifieront le dialogue avec eux (cf. *Mes-  
sage*, n°63); ils inventeront des modèles de  
développement devant intégrer le potentiel  
énorme que la jeunesse représente (cf. *Message*,  
n°63 et 64). Des pastorales pour les jeunes







Synode ont été des moments significatifs dans le processus synodal. Certains n'y ont vu qu'un mélange de folklore africain avec le rite romain. Quelqu'un aurait plaisanté en disant qu'en voyant des cardinaux participer à ces cérémonies, il avait eu l'impression de se trouver dans un jardin zoologique! Il y a eu des compromis culturels dans ces célébrations. Cela est dû à la diversité de la richesse culturelle en Afrique, à l'endroit où ces célébrations ont eu lieu et à la composition très variée de l'ensemble des participants. Mais il n'en demeure pas moins vrai qu'à travers ces célébrations eucharistiques, les Africains ont aidé leurs frères et soeurs non Africains à louer le Seigneur, ils ont pu montrer leur manière de célébrer et d'exprimer la foi chrétienne commune. L'Afrique et ses îles ont envahi la basilique Saint-Pierre; elles ont fait entendre leurs voix et exhibé leurs rythmes de danse.

### Afrique hospitalière et reconnaissante

La reconnaissance est une marque de la culture africaine. Le Synode a exprimé ses sentiments de reconnaissance à tous ceux et celles qui, chacun à son niveau et selon son engagement, apportent une contribution à l'affermissement de la foi chrétienne en Afrique et à la maturation des Eglises africaines dans le processus d'autonomie au plan matériel et financier. Le Synode a particulièrement mentionné: les missionnaires, les religieux et les religieuses, les prêtres, les théologiens africains, les catéchistes, les femmes, les Eglises-soeurs du Nord, les formateurs éducateurs dans les séminaires, les scolasticats et les noviciats, les familles chrétiennes, les laïcs engagés, les mouvements d'action catholique, les travailleurs sociaux et les agents du développement, les organisations non gouvernementales.

### Des "oubliés" qui interpellent

Le Synode était essentiellement composé de pasteurs. Il est normal qu'il se soit surtout préoccupé de résoudre des questions conjonctuelles. Du coup, on négligeait quelque peu les perspectives structurelles et le regard visant l'évangélisation au troisième millénaire. Certes, le dossier auquel le Synode devait faire face était complexe. On doit admirer l'effort du Synode pour cerner les divers problèmes du continent africain. Il est néanmoins légitime de se demander si les femmes, les jeunes, les laïcs et les théologiens ont occupé la place qui leur revient dans les réflexions synodales. Le poids de ces catégories de chrétiens dans la balance

avec les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines, nouveaux mouvements religieux.

### Souffle de liberté

L'ambiance générale du Synode respirait la détente. Chaque Père synodal a eu la possibilité et l'occasion de faire un exposé en son propre nom ou au nom d'un groupe. Les contributions pouvaient également être faites par écrit; elles ne devaient pas nécessairement se limiter au cadre tracé par l'*Instrumentum laboris*. Tant en assemblée plénière qu'en petits groupes, chacun se sentait à l'aise; la participation était active et souvent constructive. L'usage des langues vernaculaires a sans doute favorisé cette ambiance. L'apport des experts était bienvenu. Plusieurs fois le pape a encouragé les Pères synodaux à s'exprimer et utiliser les méthodes de *la palabre africaine*. Effectivement, chacun s'est exprimé librement en disant ce qu'il croyait devoir dire, même si cela s'écartait de l'enseignement habituel de l'Eglise.

### Synode vraiment africain

Le Synode a eu lieu à Rome, au Vatican. Mais la présence imposante des Africains et Africaines à cet événement, l'ambiance et les questions abordées nous autorisent à dire que l'Afrique était présente au Vatican. Le Synode pour l'Afrique a été aussi un Synode africain. Chaque matin, dans la prière introductive, un message significatif évoquait les diverses situations vécues en Afrique. Les foyers de guerre et de tensions ont été présents à l'esprit de tous. Le Rwanda, l'Angola, la Somalie, le Soudan et le Liberia n'ont cessé de résonner dans nos oreilles. Les événements heureux de l'Afrique du Sud avec ses premières élections démocratiques ne sont pas passés inaperçus. *La béatification d'un martyr zaïrois, Isidore Bakanja, durant le Synode a été une occasion de plus pour amener l'Afrique au Vatican et intensifier l'atmosphère africaine au Synode*. Le Centre SEDOS qu'on a trop vite, à mon avis, soupçonné de 'synode parallèle', de 'synode alternatif', voire même 'd'anti-synode', a joué un rôle positif: il a constitué une sorte de forum d'informations et de documentation. Il a rassemble plusieurs personnes, en particulier des Africains et des Africaines non membres du Synode qui ont apporté à leur façon une contribution à la réflexion synodale grâce aux multiples conférences et débats organisés par SEDOS.

Les messes d'ouverture et de clôture du























