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## Welcome Address



It is my privilege to welcome you all to this SEDOS Residential Seminar which we are beginning this evening and which will continue until Friday. Welcome to each and every one of you who

gathered here in presence to participate, in this beautiful setting in Nemi. Welcome also to those who are joining us online from various parts of the world.

Our topic for the week is a very interesting one:

**“The Changing Landscape of Missionary Religious Life”.**

Each day we will be invited to focus on a different dimension of this theme.

Tomorrow, Tuesday, the theological foundation for mission in this changing landscape will be explored.

On Wednesday the focus will be on Governance and Finances while Thursday will highlight the changing landscape in the context of formation. Friday is a day reserved for sharing the learnings and insights of the week – you will hear a little more about that later as the week progresses.

Pope Francis, in an interview in 2018 stated ***“we are not living in an era of change but in a change of era.”***

The Pope's statement suggests that the changes taking place in society, technology, and politics are not simply a continuation of existing trends or a natural evolution of human progress. Instead, he suggests that we are witnessing a fundamental shift in the way that people live and interact with each other.

This change of era is characterized by a number of key trends, including globalization, technological innovation, climate change, and

social inequality, trends that are reshaping the world in ways that are difficult to predict or fully understand. Pope Francis' statement reflects a deep concern about the direction of society and the need for bold action to address the challenges facing humanity. As missionaries, we are all called to be prophetic at the forefront of this bold action.

Just as society has changed and is changing, it is clear there are different ways that the landscape of mission has changed and is changing... This is a vast topic... and we look forward to hearing from each of our contributors how they locate and describe the changing landscape from their specific perspectives...

Permit me in just a few introductory words to reflect on what the title itself might mean

The Changing Landscape

Of course, the term itself comes from nature, from geography ...

Coming from a country like Ireland, I have been blessed with exposure to a wonderful variety of beautiful landscapes that are ever changing...

I grew up looking out on a beautiful vista that included hills and distant mountains – but this landscape appeared to change depending on the season and even the time of day... on the everchanging weather conditions that we have in Ireland...

These changes depend very much on the prevailing weather conditions inhibiting the ability to see the landscape and so these changes could be described as transient... .. but other factors have also changed the landscape – different farming policies influencing the colour and shape of the land... also transient changes, while others are more permanent such as the construction of new buildings and roads dotted along the landscape...

These changes I am describing are quite superficial because in many ways the underlying landscape has remained the same –

what changes are the transient conditions that hide the landscape from view ...

Nature also undergoes profound landscape changes which can inform our reflections...

Let us take a moment to look at the factors that influence these more permanent changes in landscapes that occur in nature - what is technically termed 'geomorphology'?

I am not an expert in geography or geomorphology but I have it on authority that

***Landscapes are created and changed by exogenic and endogenic processes acting along the interface between the lithosphere and the atmosphere and hydrosphere.***

For those of us who need a little revision on the geographical terms,

The ***lithosphere*** is the hard crust of earth or any other planet.

The ***hydrosphere*** relates to everything to do with water

The ***Atmosphere*** concerns the gases that surround the planet

Exogenic forces are those that come from outside of the Earth's crust. They include weathering, erosion, and deposition. Weathering is the process by which rocks are broken down into smaller pieces by physical, chemical, or biological means. This can happen due to temperature changes, water, wind, or living

organisms. Erosion is the process by which these smaller pieces of rock are transported from one place to another by water, wind, or ice. Deposition occurs when these smaller pieces of rock settle in a new location.

Endogenic forces are those that come from within the Earth's crust. They include tectonic activity and volcanic eruptions. Tectonic activity refers to the movement of plates in the Earth's crust. When plates move apart, they create rifts and valleys. When plates collide, they create mountains and earthquakes. Volcanic eruptions occur when magma from deep within the Earth rises to the surface and erupts as lava or ash.

The effects of these forces can be seen all around us. Mountains are formed by tectonic activity and erosion over millions of years. Canyons are formed by rivers cutting through rock over time. Beaches are formed by deposition of sand and other materials along shorelines.

Landscapes are therefore dynamic, acutely sensitive to natural and artificial perturbations. The changing of landscapes is a natural process which can happen very slowly over time or which can happen explosively.

Often, landscapes of greatest scenic attraction are those whose creation were strongly dominated or rocked by special events.

From our location here in Nemi. We have a view of the beautiful lake which is a volcanic lake... the crater left by this formerly active

volcano filled up with water forming this lake which has completely changed the landscape of the area... and I think we can all agree it is a beautiful feature of this area...

Nature has been changing landscapes for billions of years. However, as well as creating landscapes of astounding beauty, these natural processes can also have negative impacts. Coastal erosion can threaten homes and businesses along



shorelines. Landslides can cause damage to roads and buildings on hillsides. Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes can cause widespread destruction and loss of life. Understanding these processes enables communities to prepare for and develop prevention measures to avoid natural disasters...

After this brief foray into geographical examples of landscape changes, let us return to the focus of this seminar – the Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life and unpack this a little.

There are two very important dimensions for consideration here – Religious and Missionary....

The Catholic Church has a long and rich history of religious life, with men and women devoting themselves to God through various forms of consecrated life. However, in recent years, we have seen significant changes in this landscape, both in terms of numbers and in the way religious life is lived.

I will not say too much on this dimension as no doubt Monsignor Carballo, our keynote speaker for this evening, will address it in great depth... Religious life is constantly evolving and shifting - there has been a significant drop in numbers since Vatican II - the way religious life is lived is also evolving and many religious communities are re-evaluating their approach to consecrated life by exploring new models of community living that allow for greater flexibility and adaptability. There have also been shifts in terms of the forms of ministry undertaken by religious men and women to respond to the needs of today's world.

In 2013 Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, wrote: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security." This call to engage with the world has been taken up by many religious, through different initiatives, finding new ways to serve those in need and to be a visible sign of God's love in the world. While the numbers of men and women entering religious life may be declining, there is a growing sense of creativity and adaptability among those who remain. As we

look to the future, and consider the current landscape and its imminent changes, it is clear that religious life will continue to evolve and adapt to the needs of the Church and the world. Hopefully in the next few days we will explore some of these changes and challenges...

The history of mission, even with the briefest consideration, reveals a landscape that has changed and evolved greatly over time.... In a very informative article written in 2017, Prof. Dries Vanysacker from Leuven, gives an overview of differing expressions of mission in the history of contemporary mission – so from the 1800's onwards...

At different junctures, different mission models were promoted, lived, experienced, contributing to a constantly evolving landscape of mission.

It is a given that early expressions of mission focussed on conversion and implantation approaches, with the aim of mission taken to be converting all to Christianity for the salvation of their souls and implanting the church in local contexts. I do not want to dwell too much on this historical expression of mission, I would prefer to focus instead on some of the landscape changes since Vatican II. But to set the context I will just mention that in these early models, there was great clarity around how mission territories were defined with geographical criteria and the non-Christian world central to these definitions. There was also great clarity around the agents of mission and missionaries were dispatched by specific missionary agencies from key geographical areas for the salvation of souls through conversion, and for the implantation of the Church.

Many of our Institutes were founded when these were the dominant models of mission...

Vatican II brought about a seismic shift in the understanding of the missionary nature of the Church which impacted the self-understanding of missionaries and their role in mission. From this point on there is greater openness towards other religions and cultures, in an ecumenical attitude and there is a rediscovery of the local churches as the primary agent of mission. This awareness has led to a fundamentally new interpretation of the purpose of mission and the role of missionaries and mission agencies.

As Vanysacker states, The council still affirmed that in the midst of these new circumstances and relationships there is still need for formation of experts or, rather, trained missionaries. But the missionaries are to recognize that their task pertains to the whole church, and they are to appreciate that they are sent as ambassadors of one local church to another local church (where such a local church already exists), as witnesses of solidarity and partnership, and as expressions of mutual encounter, exchange, and enrichment (AG 26).

The landscape continued to evolve post Vatican II and as Vanysacker describes, the landscape of mission has changed from conversion of the individual souls, to conversion of the people from outside the visible Church, to Church plantation, to adaptation, to inculturation, to indigenization, to contextualization, to interreligious dialogue, to ecumenism, to *missio Dei*, to human promotion, and to witness the Word of God, and the evolution of specialized missionaries “ad gentes” to new evangelizing and to the missionary task of proclaiming and witnessing of every disciple by baptism...

Different Pope’s in their different contexts highlighted different dimensions, through Evangelii Nuntiandi and Redemptoris Missio. to Evangelii Gaudium.

Fast forward to our world of today and our current Pope, His Holiness Pope Francis. Mission or evangelization in the way it is presented in his Exhortation “*Evangelii gaudium*”, has no center and no periphery, since its center is everywhere and its periphery is nowhere. In other words, it is a mission from anywhere to everywhere and in every continent and indeed by the entire people of God wherever they are.<sup>1</sup>”

The landscape of mission has greatly changed and is changing in terms of the ‘territory’ or geographical focus - from anywhere to everywhere.

The agents of mission – from specialized missionaries to all of the baptised...

The demography – while many missionary congregations and societies originated in the western hemisphere and membership of these groups were often limited to.

### **The ministries undertaken**

Of course, the emphasis on journeying together as a Synodal Church is also impacting the landscape of religious missionary life...

As we follow the seminar throughout the week, in this beautiful setting of Nemi, we can look to nature to help us learn about and understand the changing landscape in our religious missionary life. Perhaps the landscape changes we are experiencing can be understood as natural processes that can be constructive or destructive...

- We may begin to understand what are the lithosphere, atmosphere and hydrosphere in our religious missionary world?
- What are the exogenic or external forces that impact changes in the landscape?
- What are the endogenic or the forces from within that are bringing about changes?
- What are the constructive changes that we need to embrace and develop?
- What are the destructive forces that we need to prepare for in order to be well prepared for or indeed avoid ‘natural disasters’?

***Let us entrust our reflections on the changing landscapes and the emerging future to God in the sure knowledge that although as humans we may plan and prepare, it is God, the author of all mission who decides what will be done (cf. Proverbs 16:9).’***

<sup>1</sup> Felix Wilfred, *Evangelii gaudium* – Reflections from Asia, *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 98 (2014), n°1-2, 138-141.