

POPE FRANCIS' ANTHROPOLOGICAL VISION EVOKES THE MISSION OF CONSECRATED LIFE

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Introductory remarks

«Evoke», indicates a favourable time to grasp, yet at the same time it invites us to take seriously within our Institutes of consecrated life, the calls made by Pope Francis to the entire Church to let itself be captured by the «joy of evangelisation». With the help of the USG Theological Commission, we would like to take advantage of this assembly during the Year of Consecrated Life to outline some of the early responses to the word “evoke”. If the remarks that will be expressed are principally based on the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, it is surely worth placing this reflection by Pope Francis regarding the Church and evangelisation within a multi-levelled framework of Church teachings. For example, there are the last three recent Encyclicals on Charity, Hope and Faith, and the two latest Synods on the Word of God and on the New Evangelisation and the transmission of Faith, not to mention the first conclusions of the Extraordinary Synod on Family.

Beginning with a reading of the Pope’s teachings, it is a question of identifying, on the one hand, where he highlights specific aspects of what can and must be the contribution of consecrated life to the Church’s mission, while on the other hand, how his teachings can guide the service carried out by Superiors General. Within this process, certain issues surfaced for which, further examination may contribute to renewing the theology of consecrated life, thus requiring a dialogue with the reality of this “way of living” within the Church.

Consequently, it seems that we must truly focus our remarks on a theology of the Church, which is in itself a “mission of evangelisation”, instituted as a Church within the dynamics of the mission of Christ Himself. It is based on the mystery of the Son’s Passion and Resurrection, inhabited by the mystery of the Trinity and modelled by the power of the Spirit on Christ in His mission for the salvation of the world. Obviously, it is not possible to reconsider all the most important documents that would support these statements. However, reflection upon the mission of consecrated life in the Church must certainly take the time to refer to documents that are also important such as *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*, *Ecclesiam Suam*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Vita Consecrata* (here again of different magisterial levels).

In other words, where – for very diverse reasons such as: the development of Institutes, the effects of globalisation, complementarity and tension among cultures and nations, a certain «functionalisation» of active consecrated life (where men are mostly committed to clerical functions, while women are easily limited to social works) - consecrated life is mainly concerned with its institutionalisation. The urgency is probably more on placing oneself in the perspective of the dynamics of becoming of the Church throughout the world.

Within this perspective, it will be essential to reflect on consecrated life’s charisms that are given to the Church in order to help it to be what it is and what it is called to be.

Therefore, the expression «evoke» does not only invite us to make an evaluation. This assessment is important in itself because in this year, it is clearly necessary that a realistic and courageous evaluation be made. We need to avoid using it to «focus on ourselves», but also we are called to a «renewal», when we aim at better understanding how Pope Francis' teachings makes a renewed call to consecrated life to take its full and whole place within the mission of the Church, in the name of the charisms that it was entrusted with.

An anthropology of creativity

Does Pope Francis have a specific anthropological proposal? The USG Theological Commission used this question as the starting point of its reflections during these last two years.

This echoes a moment from Fr. Spadaro's interview with the Pope¹. The question is to know how, in a time of great changes, human beings can interpret themselves in a different way with respect to the past. The answer of the Pope is rooted in a passage from St. Vincent of Lérins² and his conclusion is: «So we grow in the *understanding of the truth*. [...] Exegetes and theologians help the Church *to mature in her own judgment*. Even the other sciences and their development help the Church in this growth in understanding. [...] Even the forms for expressing truth can be multiform, and this is indeed necessary for the transmission of the Gospel in its timeless meaning.» (p. 132). This answer echoes a belief on human beings: human beings are characterised by their growth and their ability to understand themselves. Two elements should therefore be taken into consideration: on the one hand, this ability to understand oneself is moved by the search for truth; on the other, through this process of development, unity can be achieved. This is the reason why, faced with today's changes, it is so important to commit to a discernment process to which the Church must offer its own contribution through its reflection and presence among the people. In the heart of the Church, the different traditions of consecrated life may be responsible for the «evangelical memory» of this call to accept the risk of mobility for the mission. Within the framework of the contradictions and conflicts of the world, it is a risk that we can take if we are rooted in truth and unity, considered both as a gift that precedes us, as well as the horizon of the promise (*Jn 17:11*)

We could also express this belief differently by saying that human beings are capable of creativity. In order to answer to the urge to renew evangelisation, this quality is certainly essential. However, it is important that there be guidance. Through Pope Francis' teachings, we can locate several criteria to ensure that this creativity be oriented and promoted.

The first one – *never lose sight of the human being* – is the one ensuring the «validity of the thought»: «Humans are in search of themselves [...] When does an expression of thought cease to be valid? When it loses sight of the human or even when it is afraid of the human or deluded about itself. [...] The thinking of the Church must recover genius and better understand how human beings understand themselves today, in order to develop and deepen the Church's teachings (p. 133)»³.

Three key-words indicate the best conditions to foster this creativity (cf. his interview with Jesuit magazines): dialogue, discernment and frontiers. *Dialogue* always

enables to «be closer to truth, that is a gift of God, and to mutually enrich ourselves.»⁴ Through dialogue we can create bridges, rather than building up walls. *Discernment* enables to look for and find God in all things: «In the life of every human being, in culture, God is at work: the Holy Spirit blows where it wants» (p. 171). *Frontiers* highlight the drama of the split between the Gospel and culture⁵ (): «Do contribute to bridging this gap, being well aware that it is present also in the heart of each one of you and your readers» (p. 172).⁶

Therefore, beyond a single «culture of encounter», the anthropology that is present in this Exhortation highlights the role that the aim of communion has in the mission of the Church – one could say the promotion of human capacity of communion – because «to evangelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in our world» (EG 176). This is an announcement of a Gospel promoting the human being (EG 178), fraternity and justice (EG 179)⁷. This communion will also be the fruit of a calm and joyful integration of cultural diversity («Grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it», EG 115). This inculturation (that could be defined as «transculturation») is constitutive of ecclesial communion («When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity», EG 117). Evangelisation in the perspective of this ecclesial communion is integrated in history in the form of hope: «True Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, always generates history» (EG 181). In the Letter addressed to consecrated people, Pope Francis does not invite them to «wake up the world» through utopia, rather by being able to create «alternate spaces» in which to live the evangelical approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and mutual love. This call is realistic because one cannot forget that even if human history is seen within the perspective of hope, it is also marked by hindrances to communion, narrow-mindedness, fears and misunderstandings that such utopian proposals may attract.

«I am a mission on this earth»

The Exhortation reads: «My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, rising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others. But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs. We stop being a people.» (EG 273).

This quote reveals a key-element of Pope Francis’ anthropology and is linked to a belief that had already been expressed by Paul VI: «Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses» (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41). Since his election, within the Church as well as outside of it, many people have been impressed by Pope Francis’ open speech and meaningful acts. In this way he exemplifies the anthropological trait that we want to underline: through his behaviour, the messenger also becomes the message. Here it is not only a matter of enhancing the exemplary nature of an external behaviour. It is

rather a matter of highlighting the quality of the person's commitment in the word he keeps. Being deeply rooted in his desire for the Gospel, Pope Francis' word is like an invitation made to each person daring them to stick to their word, to be so bold as to draw one's strength of authenticity from the Gospel, to fundamentally dare believing in one's missionary capacity. What probably really touches people is his call to «keep one's word» in the world's conversation, first of all not to state theoretical doctrines, but rather to address himself to people beginning from his own human experience and personal faith, enlightened by those doctrines. Therefore, those with whom he is speaking all truly meet someone they can identify themselves with in his personal words and, most of all, they feel that they are called to speak out starting from their own experience.

In the Church, we often speculate on the articulation between charism and institution. This might probably be one of the issues that will be developed in the new version of *Mutuae Relationes* that is being prepared. Pope Francis' ministry offers an indication regarding the perspective to be used for considering and enforcing this articulation. There is a sort of preamble to the theoretical formulation of this connection, that is to say the commitment of people, every person's personal commitment, in the same missionary dynamics. This is precisely what connects charism and institution, charism and hierarchy. Without this commitment, people would not find themselves involved in the very same «story» of the Church's mission, which is rooted in the «story» of Christ's mission itself.

We know that Pope Francis gives special attention to the fact that the human being is growing (we could talk of an anthropology of growth in people's lives, cf. *EG* 169). This attention leads him to highlight some essential features of «*humanity in the missionary*» that develops in so far that it commits to Christ's mission.

The first characteristic is certainly the one he himself recurs to when answering to the question of defining who Pope Francis is: «I am a *sinner*», he says. This humbleness immediately calls the missionary to the hope in God's mercy that he will announce. Moreover, this statement opens up the human being to his capacity of progressing in his growth in the spiritual dimension through the mystery of forgiveness. There is no disjunction between these two dimensions of the human being, just as there is a unity in the providence of God the Creator and the Saviour.

By using the title that it seems he had already given to a first draft of a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis places in the centre of his anthropological vision the «*capacity for joy*», which we can understand being directly linked to the encounter with Christ (*EG* 3). This capacity corresponds to a general attitude of the one who is «able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith» (*EG* 7), and it marks the passage from Lent to Easter (*EG* 6). In the end, by choosing this title, the Pope highlights the importance of the evangeliser to show his humanity in these times when a renewed evangelisation is a priority and a challenge for the Church: «the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. [...] And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ» (*EG* 10). Within this perspective,

evangelisation consists in «sharing a joy» or also in «inviting to a banquet» (EG 15). This leads the Pope to speak of «missionary joy» (EG 21).

The third aspect of the missionary's humanity is that he is «*marching towards God*». Here we can refer to *Lumen Fidei*, where the character of Abraham is central to the evocation of humanity who believes. This must probably be connected to the statement that «the believer is essentially 'one who remembers'» (EG 13). If evangelisation is the main task of the Church, we are called to be always aware that we are «a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God» (EG 111)⁸. This implies that the Word of God is truly considered as the core of all ecclesial activities (contemplation of the Word and of the world, EG 154)⁹, and that it is the base of evangelisation through which it is possible to become «missionary disciples» (EG 120).

An «effort of exodus»: the spiritual challenge of the Church in mission

A «spirituality of exodus» is at the heart of the anthropology developed by Pope Francis in his teachings. Three features of this spirituality can be especially relevant in identifying important guidelines for the mission of consecrated life.

The first one could be expressed in the form of a paradox: while consecrated life is rooted in the cloistered tradition of the «*fuga mundi*», renouncing the things of the world (cf. the three vows) and everything that does not belong to God, Pope Francis calls to «go out» and reach people in existential peripheries¹⁰. Are not the latter precisely the places that are most marked by the «logic of the world»? At the same time, we need to remember that the Pope's invitation is accompanied by an often very strong criticism towards «spiritual worldliness». The solution to this paradox calls for two complementary approaches. The first is a criticism towards the attempts that everyone – including consecrated people – can make to «build» the world according to the image imposed by the mundanity of the world (globalisation, consumerism, connecting people...). The world that one needs «to flee» from is, of course, not a «given world», but rather «the world built» in the image of the human being, where it is necessary to learn to break free from all forms of slavery. Precisely in answering to the call to reach the «margins» of human life, the second approach consists in becoming a sign of contradiction. This would not happen through so-called forms of prophetic action, but it would rather take place in the framework of human experience where life develops and action is carried out within a dynamics of critical fraternity, setting off from the world's marginalised people. A criticism to worldliness starting from a fraternal solidarity with the margins of the world, a critical fraternity starting from the bottom of the world, where unity in the «solidarity of the shaken» (J. Patocka) would be used as a lever and bearing to enable the world to regain its own hope. This fraternity is expressed by Pope Francis when, in the context of this exodus, he points out the place that compassion for today's suffering members of the Body of Christ must have.

The second aspect of this spirituality of missionary exodus is to behave as «those who assist in the passage». Pope Francis' teachings allow for identifying at least four «passages» listed below, which are decisive in his vision of the human being¹¹ that is deeply anchored in the Easter mystery.

- passage to the priority given to God. Consecrated life entails consecration to someone, following a person, Jesus Christ, who demonstrated that God was the first one to love the world. It is an answer to this love (EG 39). This option for the person of the Son entails four consequences: religious people are called to promote human dignity (EG 65); the consecration to the God of Mercy offers the opportunity to learn how to face human weaknesses (EG 12); respect for the will of God on us comes before what we want to do (highlighting this «us» that underlines the community dimension as a sign of the Kingdom – EG 79); mobility is important (EG 21) and structures must serve the mission (EG 26).
- passage to the celebration of life as a gift from God that is dedicated to our neighbour. This is the source of the joy in evangelisation (EG 24). This celebration, which is rooted in the faith in the Crucified and Risen Jesus, supports discernment in the light of the Gospel (EG 77).
- passage to solidarity with contemporary worlds, rooted in the belief that God sided with human beings because He is near the weak and sinners (EG 10). By making the choice of fraternity, consecrated life becomes an eschatological sign (EG 87).
- passage to a dynamics of encounter and dialogue, echoing the kenosis movement of the Son (Ph 2:1-11). Communities must be open to others, and they need to put communion at the service of mission (EG 80). At this point we could suggest that, in this act of a «passage», it is more important to give priority to time rather than to space (EG 222-225), by always privileging the temporality of long-term dynamics over the conservation of the established spaces of present times, with their structures, certainties and power.

Finally, a third aspect of this spirituality of exodus has in itself very important values for this «sacramental aspect of missionary communion». The effort of exodus is what generates the people of God and that renders every person born to become the people of God. This membership is the safest support to the creativity of the mission.

- The people of God need to spread out through a joint commitment of the various protagonists of communion. Pope Francis specifically highlights three main challenges for this time for renewal in evangelisation. The first one is the awareness of the place and task of *lay people* in the Church: «There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church» (EG 102). How do we consider lay people who are linked to our Institutes (as those who receive pastoral care, as collaborators, as trained people who are supported and offered to the Church as partners in evangelisation)? The second is to ensure *a more incisive female presence* in the Church: «But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church» (EG 103). What happens in the deployment of our pastoral tasks? And even more radically, how do we consider the essential relationship between female and male consecrated life? (the example of our reaction to the difference between «members» and «guests» to the Synod of Bishops might be very meaningful). The third challenge is to consider *young people as partners* in evangelisation: «There remains a need, however, to ensure that these [youth] associations actively participate in the Church's overall pastoral efforts» (EG 105). How do we consider our pastoral commitment with young people? Are they mere «recipients» of our pastoral care or are they protagonists in the pastoral work of the Church?

- In today's world, dynamics of evangelisation encourages to reach those who are seeking truth and to talk to them, thus daring to enter this «conversation», especially in the «secularised» setting that marks many contemporary societies. This dialogue must especially begin with the scientific world: «When certain categories of reason and the sciences are taken up into the proclamation of the message, these categories then become tools of evangelization» (EG 132). Theology must be in a dialogue with other sciences (EG 133). How do our traditions, university and research institutions promote all this?
- The core of this evangelisation renewal must be the care for the poor and for a poor Church that will offer a concrete place to the liberation and promotion of the poor (EG 187), solidarity (EG 188) and compassion for those who suffer (EG 193): «The option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one» (EG 198). This commitment of a Church that is poor (EG 198) with and for the poor is integrated into a political anthropology that underlines the value of each person's dignity, the noble nature of political commitment, the irreducible common responsibility, the concern for the weak (EG 209), as well as the defence of life (EG 213-214). It is important here to underline the fact that closeness to the poor stems from religious people and Church members' recognition that they are vulnerable (cf. EG 85). When the members of the Church touch the suffering flesh of Christ in the poor and the marginalised people, they themselves can discover the power of tenderness and give witness to it (EG 270). Without this, the option for the poor would continue to be the option of the strongest who lower themselves to the weakest. This would still be too voluntaristic, without knowing the power of the tenderness which arises when both recognise each other as being vulnerable.

Therefore, making an effort of exodus is not a matter of theory, but rather of practical actions and guidelines given to communities and institutions in the Church, with the deep belief that the «risk of exodus» will strengthen the people of God and the joy to be on a mission. To conclude this too short study, we could say that Pope Francis develops a sort of political and evangelical anthropology that is organised around three dynamics: existential solidarity with the poor, representing a strong standpoint for a joyful and benevolent criticism of social logics that are present in the Church; integration of the charisms of consecrated life to dynamics of the sacramentality of the Church; hope for a communion which the human being is capable of.

The Superior General's service

Of course they make an effort of exodus, but how? If consecrated life somehow has the task of being the «evangelical memory» of this call, how can it itself answer to this call? Considering what I mentioned above, at this point rather than developing guidelines on what could be the «theoretical» commitment of consecrated life according to these dynamics of renewal in evangelization, we would like to question ourselves on how a Superior General may offer his contribution in accompanying the Institute he was entrusted with to put its own specific charism at the service of this ecclesial dynamics that is fostered by Pope Francis¹². Let us consider four areas that could inspire our

common reflection and maybe lead us to identify various subjects that we would like to recommend to the Theological Commission for future work.

Promoting ongoing formation of individuals and communities

Within the framework of creativity mentioned above, the task of a superior certainly includes the need to prioritise the support to people (and not only first of all to «difficult» people who often monopolise Superiors' cares). In this way, it will be possible to foster a service of the institutionalisation of charism through which charism will truly be a «path of joy» for people, insofar as they will take upon themselves the joy of this «desire for the Gospel» in their own words and commitment. This could give meaning to the need of resisting the «temptations faced by pastoral workers», but also to the promotion of ongoing formation, a personal rooting in God's Word, the encouragement to turn consecrated life into a path of faith (and not only into a regular practice of faith). In fact, the plenary assembly of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life that was celebrated last November, pointed out that one of the main challenges for our Institutes is that of ongoing formation: an ongoing formation that would truly foster the drive of renovating consecrated life's contribution to the dynamics of a renewal of evangelisation. From this point of view, ongoing formation cannot be considered first of all as a process for learning new theological, pastoral, psychological and sociological skills, but rather as a proposal to continuously deepen one's spiritual growth, to establish a living relationship with God and one's neighbour in God, in each individual's personal life. If we focus our shared reflexion on this perspective, it is of course important to be well aware of the fact that the Superior General does not always have many possibilities to foster the dynamics of ongoing formation. However, on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, we might join our efforts and offer a clear sign.

This reflection could be a chance to ask ourselves to uncover the place which Pope Francis defines as a «temptation faced by pastoral workers» in our own lives and situations. In fact, in many ways, we may consider that these «temptations» echo the difficulties that we experience in our own Institutes. The task of superiors, therefore, is not only to identify these temptations and to warn about them, but also to commit to an effort of vigilance and «resistance» together with the members of the Institute. Among the points pointed out by the Holy Father, we can bring to your attention the following: the three evils of pastoral workers, namely a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervour (*EG* 78); discouragement when facing the prevailing scepticism with regard to the Church's message (media culture and some intellectual circles) and an escape to a «worldliness» enabling «to be like the others» (*EG* 79); the risk of practical relativism (*EG* 80) or of a «gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church» (*EG* 83); a selfish sloth accompanied with the temptation to «guard personal freedom» and escape commitment (*EG* 81, but also *EG* 88); how can we analyse temptations towards functionalism, that is so frequent sometimes in the evolution of our relationship to ministries? From an institutional point of view, how could we be deaf to the Pope's call to develop a fair relationship to projects, leaving also room for the sense of defeat, to the spirituality of the Cross (*EG* 85: *EG* 96: «How often we dream up vast apostolic projects, meticulously planned, just like defeated generals!»?) Do we let ourselves be tempted by the spirituality of well-being and the theology of prosperity (*EG* 90), only out of a «competitive» or «marketing» spirit? The Pope's remarks certainly invite us to dare to develop a theology and a spirituality that make room for the sense of

defeat. In this way, we will learn to live in Christ and in communion with the religious brotherhood, as well as with the whole Church, the defeats and failures that concern us all, from a physical, psychological, moral and social point of view.

It is in this framework of ongoing «integral» formation that it is important to place guidance to people. In fact, with the aim of fostering each one's desire to live a personal encounter with Christ (*EG* 264), the service of the Superior General will be to try to promote the conditions to live the joy of being missionary disciples. These include both a tireless call to dive into the mystery of God's Word, as well as its most «*crucified*» aspects if compared to our spontaneous desires for self-realisation and well-being (*EG* 42; 86; 91). We could say that the Superior General then becomes the servant of a spirituality of evangelisation: a personal encounter with the redeeming love of Jesus (*EG* 264), the joy to be the people of God (*EG* 268), the trust in the mysterious action of the Risen Christ and of His Spirit (*EG* 275), as well as the missionary strength of intercession (*EG* 281). This also leads back to Chapter 5 of the Exhortation, and the speculation on Mary, the Mother of Evangelisation. More radically, ongoing formation will probably have to always be able to represent a privileged path of evangelisation for the members of the Institute themselves (*EG* 164). We are all always in need of being the recipients of the «first announcement» of the Gospel, called as we are as missionaries who never cease being disciples (*EG* 266).

Promoting, all together, the conscience of having to respond to a single mission of the Church

How could we place consecrated life in the dynamics of evangelisation presented by the Pope? We read at N. 130: «The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church. They are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the Church, drawn to the center which is Christ and then channelled into an evangelizing impulse. A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God's holy and faithful people for the good of all.» The work of discernment of consecrated life must be carried out in this ecclesial perspective.

When we deal with the issue of consecrated life's mission in the mission of today's Church according to the guidelines presented by Pope Francis, we cannot avoid considering the recent Letter he addressed to consecrated people on the occasion of the opening of the Year dedicated to Consecrated Life by the Universal Church. We need to recall that he identified several aims for this Year, which undoubtedly represent the keynotes of consecrated life's contribution to the creation of the Church he desires. These are: looking at the past with gratitude; living the present with passion («Is Jesus truly our first and only love, as we promised He would be when we professed our vows?») and becoming «experts in communion»; and embracing the future with hope. And he expresses his expectations from consecrated people: to radiate joy; to wake up the world by offering prophecies and to be able to create alternate spaces where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love for one another can thrive; to be «experts in communion»; to come out of themselves and go forth to the existential peripheries; to question what it is that God and people today are asking of them¹³.

Giving way to the crisis of communal commitment

In order to face what the Pope defines as a «crisis of communal commitment» (Chapter 2), he highlights the need to operate an «evangelical discernment» (EG 50) and to focus on an «ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times» (EG 51). When reading this chapter, it is evident that consecrated life is called to face the same challenges, because its areas are penetrated by the same dynamics and logics that shape contemporary worlds. Even if not all, one could therefore identify several challenges that could be considered as a call to Superiors General to pay close attention.

Globalisation of indifference (EG 54): many of our Institutes are international and their members are exposed to the same differences, as well as the same indifference (e.g.: Ukraine, Middle-East, Central African Republic...).

Financial crisis (EG 55) and economy of exclusion (EG 53): questions on the Institutes' investments, as well as on solidarity policies, starting within Institutes themselves?

Consumerism logic that fuels the logic of unequal economy: how to assess Institutes' standards of living, not simply those of people (which is often quite simple), but also those of communities and general structures.

How to accompany, be with and support the victims of social inequalities generating violence (EG 60)? How does this compassion-generated solidarity have a real impact on restructuring our institutions and structures?

If consecrated life Institutes are called to propose «utopias», they certainly have to answer the question of knowing how «worldly logics» mark the lives of people and communities, as well as the degree of commitment of people in communities and in the communal commitment of the Institute. Once again, we could use Pope Francis' method, according to which, the call to evangelisation must be welcomed by the same evangelising workers. This is how it is truly possible to embark on an «effort of exodus».

Discernment for spreading the charism and helping the Church in its mission

Some issues for reflection seem truly critical if we want to avoid pessimistic dreams, short-sight analysis of reality or indecisive declarations of intent.

I think that the main risk is that of paradoxical injunctions. Here are some examples:

- Living the commitment of consecrated life in the (or of) the context of secularism at least with a «widespread indifference and relativism» (EG 61), and considering that this context «has meant an hastened deterioration of [...] cultural roots» or blaming «secularist rationalism» in contemporary reality: is this the most accurate analysis of reality (EG 62-63)? How is it possible to avoid limiting ourselves to a negative judgment of globalised culture (as expressed in EG 77)?
- Wondering about the credibility of the Church as an institution (EG 65) even if our same religious institutions harden insofar as they feel they are fragile;
- Questioning the crisis that the family is experiencing (EG 66), partially linked to individualism that «favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds» (EG 67) without wondering about the impact of all this on the nature of community bonds themselves;

- Emphasising the fact that «It is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculcate the Gospel» (EG 69), without always considering cultural changes in the development of dynamics and the rhythms of consecrated life in daily dimension (e.g., how is it possible to include a «technical and scientific» culture in this process of inculturation? Cf. the difficulties with integrating the new social networks on a community level);
- Highlighting the value of popular piety and the new forms of religious life (EG 70), without always finding how to include and integrate them in the spirituality and devotions established in a given tradition;
- This would be in accordance with another strain between the need for «an evangelization capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values» (EG 74), and the challenge to include contemporary cultures in the heart of a spiritual tradition by welcoming the new generations that bear them. Here there is the challenge to open up to others' creativity, especially that of new generations and cultures that are different from the founding one, in terms of life, celebration, sharing of faith and Word and ways of meeting people.
- This would be most likely evident if one took time to discern the richness and challenges of this «completely new culture [that] has come to life and continues to grow in the cities» (EG 73), and measure how we are affected by a feature of these urban cultures: «what could be significant places of encounter and solidarity often become places of isolation and mutual distrust» (EG 75) ;

To conclude ...

It is by now clear that the challenge of this call to fully take part in the evangelisation renewal must not entail that consecrated life create new strategic plans. It is rather a call to use a «spiritual» approach to face the challenges and risks of today's evangelisation. It is an invitation to a spirituality of creativity fully summoned up by the hope of communion. It is a spirituality of a generous self-giving and of the courage to take risks. It prefers to run the risk of failing than to settle in the false security of immobilism. It is a spirituality that resists worldliness and consists in «choosing [mystical and contemplative] fraternity» (EG 91). It then gives such an essential witness to evangelisation, that of fraternal communion (EG 99), that of being very vigilant to avoid «spiritual worldliness» (EG 93) and of rejecting any indulgence towards the «war among us» (EG 98), of which traces are evident in the links between the works of consecrated people that are still marked by competition.

In the end, the Year of Consecrated Life is undoubtedly an opportunity that is offered to all consecrated people to commit to following the «path of exodus». The absolute priority of this path is not to build institutions but rather to welcome salvation brought by Christ, to let oneself be saved by Him, to welcome the announcement of the Kingdom that is near with always a greater joy, and thus, to let the Holy Spirit continuously render the relationships of fraternal communion and pastoral solidarity more creative for the Kingdom.

¹ - *Le Pape François. L'Église que j'espère. Entretien avec le Père Spadaro, sj*, Coll. Champs Essais, Flammarion, Paris, 2014 – transl. by F. Ewé ; H. Nicq ; F. Livi – or. ed. 2013, p. 131 ff. (In English: *A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis* – edited by HarperOne (December 10, 2013).)

² - Passage by St. Vincent of Lerins in the Office of the Readings of the Feria Sexta, that is Friday, of the 27th week of Ordinary Time. To the question «Is there to be no development of religion in the Church of Christ?», St. Vincent of Lerins answers the following: « Certainly. [...] But it must truly be development of the faith, not alteration of the faith. [...] The understanding, knowledge and wisdom of one and all, of individuals as well as of the whole Church, ought then to make great and vigorous progress with the passing of the ages and the centuries, but only along its own line of development, that is, with the same doctrine, the same meaning and the same import.» And later on in the document the quote that the Pope will use for his answer: «In the same way, the doctrine of the Christian religion should properly follow these laws of development, that is, by becoming firmer over the years, more ample in the course of time, more exalted as it advances in age».

³ - Cf. the «times of brilliance» in the history of the Church, like that for example of Thomas Aquinas, said the Pope, p. 133 *ibid.*

⁴ - Interview of *Civiltà Cattolica*, June 2013, cf. p. 170 *ibid.*

⁵ - Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, N. 20.

⁶ - One may recall the Pope's remarks in his recent Letter to Consecrated People, inviting them to ask themselves what God and mankind of today require from them.

⁷ - In his Letter to Consecrated People, Pope Francis calls them to be «experts in communion».

⁸ - In his Letter to Consecrated People, Pope Francis expects them to go out and reach people in existential peripheries.

⁹ - *Verbum Domini* N. 1, quoted in *EG* 174.

¹⁰ - Cf. Contribution by Fr. Henry Donneaud, OP, to the USG Theological Commission, Rome, October 1, 2014: *Revisiter la fuga mundi à la lumière de la critique de la « mondanité spirituelle » par le Pape François.*

¹¹ - Cf. Contribution by Fr. Budi Kleden, SVD, to the USG Theological Commission, Rome, October 1, 2014: «*Passing over*»: *A theological vision for religious life*».

¹² - This recalls the first theme proposed: «*Come esercitare il servizio del superiore generale per promuovere la missione proposta da Papa Francesco ?*»

¹³ - *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People*, November 21, 2014.