

**Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
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*The following is the text provided to LCWR by Simona Brambilla, MC.  
Her address to the LCWR assembly was excerpted from this text.*

## **Consecrated Life in Transformation: Paths of Hope**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Synod's on synodality *Final Document* states:

“From the very beginning, the Church has recognised the action of the Spirit in men and women who have followed Christ along the path of the evangelical counsels, consecrating themselves to the service of God, whether through contemplation or other forms of service. They are called to interrogate Church and society with their prophetic voice. Across their centuries-long history, the various forms of consecrated life elaborated what we now recognise as practices of synodal living. These include how to practise discernment in common and to harmonise together individual gifts as well as pursue mission in common. Orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes, as well as associations, movements and new communities, all have a special contribution to make to the growth of synodality in the Church. Today, many communities of consecrated life are like laboratories for inter-cultural living in a way that is prophetic for both the Church and the world.”<sup>1</sup>

This section of the Final Document already offers several insights into how consecrated life can be a sign of hope, today. It speaks of prophecy, synodality, communal discernment, the harmonization of individual gifts with a common mission, and interculturality.

Today, we will try to revisit together some paths of hope in Consecrated Life. We will do this using a register that is more evocative than conceptual, drawing inspiration from images, biblical scenes, and existential icons.

### **2. THE TIME OF THE MOON**

As a missionary, convinced that mission is not only about sowing but also, and above all, about harvesting the life that God grows in people and among peoples, allow me to begin this reflection by drawing inspiration from a couple of proverbs of the Makua people of Mozambique:

*God is not like the sun going solo through the world, but like the moon going with the stars.*

*If the moon had a bad heart, we would not see the stars.*

The moon, for the Makua people, is that humble star that illuminates the night, making it fascinating and mysterious. It is called a humble star because, according to the expression of folk wisdom, while the sun, blazing brightly in the sky, extinguishes the light of the other stars during the day, the moon prefers to coexist with the glow of the stars and planets in the night sky. The sun, for the Makua, travels alone, the only king and lord of the day. The moon, on the other hand, travels in company, inhabiting the horizon of communion and sharing that finds in the night, a time of intimacy, a privileged expression.

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<sup>1</sup> XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS - “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*” October 26, 2024, n. 65. (From now on abbreviated as: DF).

When the sun rises, it extinguishes the stars. The moon, by contrast, shines in the night, and its light, reflecting off the stars, enhances and magnifies its splendor. The sun is so bright that it is impossible to look at it. One can look at the moon, enjoy the spectacle of the starry sky and find inspiration in its glow.

The image of the starry sky offered to us by Makua wisdom can serve as a mirror of the current social and ecclesial context, characterized by a plurality of thought, movement, subjects, and ways of understanding and living the mission. In the dance of this cosmos, inhabited by a surprising variety of stars, we consecrated men and women feel called to a healthy review and to a journey of conversion toward what is our deepest identity. The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality identifies conversion as the common thread running through it: conversion of the heart, of relationships, of processes, of bonds.

We realize that, throughout our history, somewhat like the sun in the Makua proverbs, we have often fallen into the temptation of measuring evangelical effectiveness by the yardstick of our “own light”—the blazing splendor that extinguishes the light of other stars, a luminous self-sufficiency. Today’s multicolored context, along with a sharper awareness of our smallness—fostered by declining numbers and an aging population—urges us to embrace a style of synodal presence in which the “lunar” expression happily finds its place: humble stars called to illuminate, along with other stars and planets, the firmament of this night that is our time.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Synodal Assembly beautifully evoked the image of the moon in these terms:

Christ is the light of the nations” (LG 1), and this light shines on the face of the Church, which “is in Christ as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity” (*ibid.*). Like the moon, the Church shines with reflected light: it cannot, therefore, understand its mission self-referentially but receives the responsibility of being the sacrament of bonds, relationships and communion in service to the unity of all humanity. We bear this responsibility in times now dominated by the crisis of participation, the absence of a sense that we have a common destiny, and a too-often individualistic conception of happiness and, therefore, of salvation. In living out this mission, the Church communicates God’s plan to unite all humanity to Himself in salvation. In doing so, it does not proclaim itself “but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor 4:5). If this were not so, it would lose its being in Christ “as a sacrament” (cf. LG 1) and therefore, its own identity and *raison d’être*. On the way to fullness, the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God in the world.<sup>2</sup>

“Drinking from the fountain that springs forth and flows...although it is night:” this was the theme of the 2010 Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General. In fact, our time can be considered as night: the sun has set, and it is the time of the moon. The real light gives way to reflected light. It is a time when the contours of reality are not so marked. It is also a time when slumbering ghosts awaken within and among us, taking the form of a thousand questions, uncertainty, and fears: Who are we? Where are we going? What will we become? Where will we end up? ... Will we come to an end?

Nighttime can be scary. But night is also the best time for creativity. The moon’s discreet glow provides the space for freedom, allowing the seekers not only to see with their eyes but also to imagine, feel, and intuit. The moon restores inner vision. The moon leads us to the invisible. To a time of dreams. To a time of intimacy, to a time of returning to fundamental questions. A time of life

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<sup>2</sup> XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *How to Be a Synodal Missionary Church, Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Session, October 2024, n. 4.

and death, of conception and birth, a time of hope, waiting, and transformation. We feel this challenge in our bones every day: the challenge to read the signs of this time of night and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel.

This is “our hour.” Not the hour of the blazing, solitary sun, but the hour of the humble star shining in shared company. The night in which we are called to recover our inner vision in order to perceive the essential, and to free ourselves from the fleeting lights of all that is not the Gospel. The night in which we sense profoundly the need to rediscover the authentic values of our consecration. A night in which, as individuals, as a community, as Institutes, as Consecrated Life, we feel awakening deep within ourselves, sometimes in a painfully intense way, the attraction to “return to the center,” understood as the core of fire that animates our vocation.

This is our hour: let us seize it as a time of nighttime labor, a prelude to the cry of a new life, necessarily small and unarmed. It is night. A blessed night. Advent night. Easter night. Night of rebirth.

### 3. THE TIME OF PROPHECY

Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:22-38)

<sup>22</sup>When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, <sup>23</sup>just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, <sup>24</sup>and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. <sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. <sup>27</sup>He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, <sup>28</sup>he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

<sup>29</sup>“Now, Master, you may let your servant go  
in peace, according to your word,

<sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples:

<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and glory for your people Israel.”

<sup>33</sup>The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; <sup>34</sup>and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted <sup>35</sup>—and you yourself a sword will pierce— so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. <sup>38</sup>And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon and Anna introduce us to another path of hope: that of **prophecy**. The prophet, in the Bible,

is par excellence a transcendent and personal messenger of God. (...) The terms used to refer to the Prophet are manifold. He is referred to 315 times as a *nabî*, probably meaning “called”, thus moved by a divine intervention in his life, as one of them, Amos (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), recalls: “I was not a prophet nor the son of prophets; I was a shepherd and a gatherer of sycamore trees. The Lord took me from behind the cattle and said to me, ‘Go and prophesy

to my people Israel''' (7:14–15). Another definition is that of “man of God”, repeated 76 times, especially for Elijah and Elisha, the first prophets in the strict sense, whose writings have not come down to us. We have only biographical accounts, replete with “fioretti,” collected in the Books of Kings. There is, then, the term *hōzeh*, “visionary” (16 times), which can be linked to *ro’eh*, “seer” (11 times): what stands out here is the presence of a transcendent vision that reveals a divine message within. But the ancient Greek version of the Bible, known as the Septuagint, and the New Testament adopted the Greek word *profētēs*, containing the verb *femí*, “to speak,” and the preposition *pró*, which has three useful meanings for defining the prophetic mission: “in lieu of, before, in front of.” The first meaning is crucial: the prophet speaks “in the name of God;” he is His spokesman to the people. Precisely because of this function, the prophet is a man of the present and not so much a prophet of an unknown future; he is involved in history, in society, in the dramas of his time.<sup>3</sup>

Simeon and Anna: two **prophetic** figures who appear like sparks of light in Luke's Gospel, in the episode of Jesus' presentation in the temple, only to disappear immediately afterwards, a little like the star that, in Matthew's Gospel, leads the Magi to Bethlehem. Let us try to tune in to their trail of warm and gentle light. The Gospel scene is marked by a series of movements. There is the movement of waiting, which in Simeon expresses vigilance and a loving attentiveness to the Spirit. The Spirit touches him, inhabits him, moves him. It moves his body, his mind, his heart, his outer and inner senses—open, fully active, refined by loving desire.

Pope Francis, in one of his catechesis on the figure of Simeon, expressed it this way:

we learn that the fidelity of waiting sharpens the senses. Besides, as we know, the Holy Spirit does precisely this: enlightens the senses. In the ancient hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, with which we continue to this day to invoke the Holy Spirit, we say: “*Accende lumen sensibus*,” (Guide our minds with your blest light), enlighten our senses. The Spirit is capable of doing this: of sharpening the senses of the soul.<sup>4</sup>

The Holy Spirit – these too are words of the Holy Father - is the protagonist in this scene. He makes Simeon's heart burn with desire for God. He keeps expectation alive in his heart: He impels him to go to the Temple and he enables his eyes to recognize the Messiah, even in the guise of a poor little baby. That is what the Holy Spirit does: he enables us to discern God's presence and activity not in great things, in outward appearances or shows of force, but in littleness and vulnerability. Think of the cross. There too we find littleness and vulnerability, but also something dramatic: the power of God. (...)

What do our eyes see? Simeon, moved by the Spirit, sees and recognizes Christ. And he prays, saying: “My eyes have seen your salvation” (v. 30). This is the great miracle of faith: it opens eyes, transforms gazes, changes perspectives. As we know from Jesus' many encounters in the Gospel, faith is born of the compassionate gaze with which God looks upon us, softening the hardness of our hearts, healing our wounds and giving us new eyes to look at ourselves and at our world. New ways to see ourselves, others and all the situations that we experience, even those that are most painful. This gaze is not naïve but sapiential. A naïve gaze flees reality and refuses to see problems. A sapiential gaze, however, can “look within” and “see beyond.” It is a gaze that does not stop at appearances but can enter into the very cracks of our weaknesses and

<sup>3</sup> G. RAVASI, *NABÍ: prophet*, <https://www.famigliacristiana.it/blogpost/nabi-profeta.aspx>, August 26, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> FRANCIS, General Audience, Paul VI Audience Hall, March 30, 2022.

failures, in order to discern God's presence even there. The eyes of the elderly Simeon, albeit dimmed by the years, see the Lord. They see salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Anna is a woman, widowed and elderly—a fragile figure devoid of power or grandeur. Yet, she is called a prophetess, and prophecy passes through the fragility of this creature. Anna reminds us of other biblical women like Elizabeth and Naomi: frail, elderly women empowered and transformed by a Power from on High.

*She never left the temple:* Anna remains in God's house, dwells in the temple, dwells where God dwells. She dwells in God and from this perspective she contemplates, understands and interprets reality.

*She worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer:* Anna fasts. She fasts from everything that is not God and that is not of God. Anna, the prophetess, is nourished by God. Anna moves and lives in God, and within the loving space of this so intimate and vital relationship she learns to see reality with God's gaze, discovering Redemption, Life, and Salvation in fragile signs.

Pope Francis, in his homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on the XXVIII World Day of Consecrated Life, February 2, 2024, presented us once again with the figures of Simeon and Anna.

It is good for us to look at these two elders who were waiting patiently, vigilant in spirit and persevering in prayer. Their hearts have stayed awake, like an eternal flame. They are advanced in age, but young at heart. They do not let the days wear them down, for their eyes remain fixed on God in expectation (cf. Ps 145:15). Fixed on God in expectation, always in expectation. Along life's journey, they have experienced hardships and disappointments, but they have not given in to defeat: they have not "retired" hope. As they contemplate the child, they recognize that the time has come, the prophecy has been fulfilled, the One they sought and yearned for, the Messiah of the nations, has arrived. By staying awake in expectation of the Lord, they are able to welcome him in the newness of his coming.

Brothers and sisters, waiting for God is also important for us, for our faith journey. Every day the Lord visits us, speaks to us, reveals himself in unexpected ways and, at the end of life and time, he will come. He himself exhorts us to stay awake, to be vigilant, to persevere in waiting. Indeed, the worst thing that can happen to us is to let "our spirit doze off", to let the heart fall asleep, to anesthetize the soul, to lock hope away in the dark corners of disappointment and resignation.

I think of you, consecrated sisters and brothers, and of the gift that you are; I think of us Christians today: are we still capable of waiting? Are we not at times too caught up in ourselves, in things and in the intense rhythm of daily life to the point of forgetting God who always comes? Are we not too enraptured by our good works, which runs the risk of turning even religious and Christian life into having "many things to do" and neglecting the daily search for the Lord? Don't we sometimes risk planning personal and community life by calculating the odds of success, instead of cultivating the small seed entrusted to us with joy and humility, with the patience of those who sow without expecting anything and those who know how to wait for God's time and let him surprise us?<sup>6</sup>

May the Lord grant us the wisdom of watchful and hopeful waiting! May He give us the humble

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<sup>5</sup> FRANCIS, Homily at the Mass for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on the 26th World Day for Consecrated Life, St. Peter's Basilica, February 2, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> FRANCIS, Homily at the Mass for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on the 26th World Day for Consecrated Life, St. Peter's Basilica, February 2, 2024.

prophecy of smallness inhabited by God. May He bestow upon us a gaze like that of Simeon and Anna, able to recognize with wonder and emotion the most humble and royal, strong and tender force of God's Love, revealed in poor, fragile, and weak signs, like a child in its mother's arms, like a grain of wheat falling to the earth and dying to bear fruit, like bread broken for the life of all.

#### 4. THE CHARCOAL FIRE

The biblical passage that accompanied the work of the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly, and which forms the backdrop of the *Final Document*, is that of the 'Resurrection Catch of Fish' (Jn 21:1-14), insightfully presented and illustrated by Fr. Timothy Radcliffe during the opening retreat and at other moments of the Assembly's proceedings. This is the third and final appearance of the Risen Jesus to the disciples, at the Sea of Galilee. The passage is rich with images. Here, I will pause only on one scene, so simple, yet so intense, which leads us into another path of hope.

When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead. (Jn 21:9-14).

Fire is a powerful and dynamic image that Sacred Scripture loves to use. Pope Francis deepens this image in several of his speeches. In one of them, the Holy Father highlights the image of *burning embers* in the Gospel passage quoted above:

"It is a small fire that Jesus himself built close to the shore, as the disciples in their boats were hauling up their nets miraculously filled with fish. Simon Peter arrived first, jumping into the water, filled with joy (cf. v. 7). That charcoal fire is quiet and gentle, yet it lasts longer and is used for cooking. There on the shore of the sea, it creates a familiar setting where the disciples, amazed and moved, savor their closeness to their Lord."<sup>7</sup>

The charcoal fire is the fire of "home," of family. It is the fire of charity among us, of brotherhood/sisterhood, of the warmth of strong and delicate bonds that inflame the heart and open it to the experience of God's love, of the Lord's closeness. How often, when listening to consecrated men and women, when conversing together, does the desire and need to grow in weaving bonds of this kind emerge, powerful and heartfelt, bonds of fire, nourished by charity, blessing, benevolence, care, delicacy, attention, and respect! How much we long for the charcoal fire!

In Jn 21:9-14, Jesus appears in a somewhat unusual guise: he is cooking, preparing food for his disciples. Let us allow ourselves to be challenged and drawn in by this image, which in its simplicity and everyday nature conveys profound meanings and evokes intense suggestions.

##### 4.1 The guardian of the fire

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<sup>7</sup> FRANCIS, *Homily at the Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals and for the Vote on Certain Causes of Canonization*, Vatican, August 27, 2022.

Jesus, who lights and tends the charcoal fire and prepares food for his own, is the splendid image of authority as service, that is, of the man or woman who guards and nurtures the growth of the brothers and sisters. The word comes from the Latin *auctoritas*, derived from the verb *augere*, meaning “to make grow.” There is an inevitable connection, through their common root, between this word and “author.” Once again, the reference point is Latin. Among the various meanings of the Latin term *auctor* are not only “one who makes grow,” but also “one who grants success” or “one who leads to a happy, prosperous outcome.”<sup>8</sup> Authority finds its true meaning in humbly serving the ‘success’ of the other, that is, their growth and their flourishing as a human being, as a Christian, as a consecrated person, as one called to Love. The CICLSAL Instruction on Authority and Obedience, published in 2008, emphasized that

In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority. Persons in authority recognize that they are called to serve an ideal that is much greater than themselves, an ideal which can be approached only in an atmosphere of prayer and humble seeking, which allows them to grasp the action of the same Spirit in the heart of every brother or sister. Persons in authority are “spiritual” when they place themselves at the service of what the Spirit wants to realize through the gifts which he distributes to every member of the community, in the charismatic project of the institute.<sup>9</sup>

In this regard,

Persons in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person, paying attention to each member of the community and to his or her growth, giving to each one the appropriate appreciation and positive consideration, nurturing sincere affection towards all and keeping reserved all that is said in confidence.<sup>10</sup>

During the Synodal Assembly, the need for a conversion of decision-making processes and the exercise of authority in the various areas of the Church was repeatedly emphasized, in order to promote an integral vision and free it from possible narcissistic/clericalist tendencies and from anything that might lead it away from the Gospel.

In prayer and dialogue, we have recognized that ecclesial discernment, the care for decision-making processes, the commitment to accountability and the evaluation of our decisions are practices through which we respond to the Word that shows us the paths of mission. These three practices are closely intertwined. Decision-making processes need ecclesial discernment, which requires listening in a climate of trust that is supported by transparency and accountability. Trust must be mutual: decision-makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God. The latter, in turn, needs to be able to trust those in authority. This integral vision highlights that each of these practices depends on and supports the others, thus serving the Church’s ability to fulfil its mission. Formation is needed in order to engage in decision-making processes grounded in ecclesial discernment and which reflect a culture

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. FR. FALLAI, “*Authority:*” All the Secrets of an Ancient Word with Many Meanings, November 20, 2020, [https://www.corriere.it/scuola/20\\_novembre\\_25/autorita-tutti-segreti-una-parola-antica-che-ha-tanti-significati-70af4e26-2cde-11eb-a006-0b5f9624cb77.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/scuola/20_novembre_25/autorita-tutti-segreti-una-parola-antica-che-ha-tanti-significati-70af4e26-2cde-11eb-a006-0b5f9624cb77.shtml)

<sup>9</sup> CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*, Instruction, Rome 2008, n.13 a.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, n. 13.c.

of transparency, accountability, and evaluation. The formation required is not only technical; it also needs to explore theological, biblical and spiritual foundations. All the Baptized need this formation in witness, mission, holiness and service, which emphasizes co-responsibility. It takes on particular forms for those in positions of responsibility or at the service of ecclesial discernment.<sup>11</sup>

Evangelical authority stirs, guards, and nourishes the sacred fire that gathers brothers and sisters around the one Bread of Life, makes them grow as people of God, and inflames them with that Love that unites diverse people with bonds of charity as ardent as they are delicate.

#### 4.2 Together, around the charcoal fire

The image of Jesus cooking for his disciples on the shore of the lake and calling them to eat together also recalls the experience of sharing a meal. Happily enriched by Bantu-Makua thinking, I like to imagine our Congregations or communities as a kitchen: all of us sitting around the same fire and the same pot, each one contributing some ingredient of life to cook a good polenta that will nourish everyone. A Makua proverb says: “The pot of polenta is one, but the portions of polenta are different.” In the Bantu-African worldview, we all come from the same “pot,” we are made of the same “dough,” we are nourished by the same life. In a family, it is unthinkable to cook polenta in many different pots: the pot to draw from is one, the flour the same, even if it is distributed in distinct portions. The Church, which is nourished by the same and singular Bread of Life, cannot help but recognize itself in this image. It is called to make this vision ever more real and visible, not only at the liturgical and celebratory level, but also in its structures, its economy, its pastoral practices, and in its styles of life and relationship. The same applies to our Congregations/Institutes. Evangelical and charismatic inculturation and interculturality are an unavoidable requirement if we truly want to accept the invitation to eat from the same pot. The dialogue between charism and cultures is not merely a necessity: it is an opportunity and a gift, a chance to discover the original riches that God has placed in every people, to receive them into the *charismatic pot* and share them with the rest of humanity. To miss the chance to come into contact with the human and spiritual experience of a people also means missing the opportunity to encounter a unique and original experience of God, given to that people to be shared, to enrich, to increase, and to transform the Life of all those who are willing to “eat from the same pot.” What is the unique and original ingredient this people can bring to the congregation? What light does their experience of journeying with God shed on our understanding of the charism? What have we received from this people? How has this people evangelized us? How has it contributed to the vitality of the charism?

#### 5. THE “MYSTIQUE OF WE”

Pope Francis has repeatedly spoken of the call to move from “I” to “we,” of the need to “unite as a family that is stronger than the sum of small individual members,”<sup>12</sup> of the “challenge of finding

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<sup>11</sup> DF, 79-80.

<sup>12</sup> FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Assisi 2020, n. 78. The Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* provides many profound insights on this subject. In it, Pope Francis invites us to dream, “as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home” (FT, n. 8), and “to become a ‘we’ who inhabit the Common Home” (FT, n. 17) etc. See also the interview granted by Pope Francis to Tg5, January 10, 2021. Cf. <https://www.avvenire.it/chiesa/pagine/intervista-papa-francesco-tg5>



and sharing a “mystique” of living together,”<sup>13</sup> “to live in a liberating and responsible way the experience the Church as a “mystique” of living together.”<sup>14</sup> The synod process has taken up, among others, the Pauline image of the one body<sup>15</sup> and “gave us the ‘spiritual taste’ (EG 268) of what it means to be the People of God, gathered from every tribe, language, people, and nation, living in different contexts and cultures. It is never the simple sum of the Baptized but the communitarian and historical subject of synodality and mission.”<sup>16</sup>

I would like to pause for a moment on this image of the body, which I believe opens before us another path of hope, and try to apply it to our Institutes.

Each Institute, animated by a particular charism, is somewhat like a body, animated by a unique and particular vital energy. Indeed, the Institute, the community, every human group, behaves in many ways like a living organism, made up of different parts but united by a single life. In each cell, distinct from the others, is contained the same DNA that identifies and makes that body unique.

Now, when I have pain in a finger, what do I do? The last thing I think of is to cut it off! Rather, I take care of it. My attention is directed toward the wounded finger. My mind begins working to understand what I need to do to heal it. The rest of the body collaborates: my legs carry me to the doctor or the pharmacy. My healthy hand moves to pick up the disinfectant and the gauze to treat the wound. My eyes stay alert to where I pour the disinfectant and how to wrap the finger with the bandage. My ears are attentive to what the doctor tells me to do... and so on.

“Everything is related,” “everything is linked,” “everything is connected:” this is the refrain that runs through Pope Francis’ *Laudato si’*. The image of the body expresses vividly and clearly the connection that exists among us: we, as creatures; we, as human beings; we, as Christians; we, as members of the body of an Institute, animated by a unique and original charism. In fact, the Institute is a charismatic body. All of us are deeply connected by virtue of our shared humanity, our faith, our belonging to Christ, and our belonging to the same charism that makes us sisters/brothers, transfiguring our relationships into sacred bonds, into veins and arteries that nourish the one body and through which the lifeblood of the charism flows.

Just like in a physical body, every part, every organ, every cell has an effect on the rest. If a single cell turns abnormal, it can become a cancer that spreads and reaches other organs, putting the entire organism at risk. If the lungs are healthy, they provide oxygen to the whole body and remove carbon dioxide, sustaining vitality in every part, whether small or great. What happens in one part of the body affects the whole. And what happens to the body as a whole, in some way, reverberates in each of its parts.

Within the body of the Institute, what circulates is what its members introduce. Every one of our actions and words, our thoughts and feelings, is energy that flows through the dense web of our relationships and ultimately affects everyone, because we are all united in one body, nourished by the same blood of the living charism. No word, no gesture, no thought or feeling is neutral: every expression of life has consequences, for good or for bad. Nothing, not even what I feel and think secretly, what I guard in the most intimate corners of my heart, or say behind closed doors, nothing

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<sup>13</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome 2013, n. 87.

<sup>14</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, Rome 2017, n. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. DF, nn. 16, 21, 26, 27, 36, 57, 88.

<sup>16</sup> DF, n. 17.

is neutral. Mysteriously, because we are “all connected” at a deep level, of spirit, of charism, what I feel, think, say, do, or desire is introduced into the circulation of the body and bears its consequences, whether beneficial or harmful. So, what I do and say, but also what I think and feel, does not remain confined to my small private world, but flows through the threads of the network that connects us and makes us sisters and brothers.

To accompany an Institute-as-body, a living organism, in expressing its fruitfulness, its generative capacity, the very purpose for which it came into the world, means first of all to accompany it in constantly connecting and reconnecting with what gives it life, the charism. It also means caring for what circulates within those vital connections.

The charism does not belong to the Institute; it is not its possession. It is a gift of God to the world, it is Spirit, it is Life. The Institute, and each brother/sister within it, receives it as a free gift, to be lived within oneself, a vital force to be allowed to flow freely and creatively through us, not something to be embalmed or mummified like a museum piece. As Pope Francis says:

Every charism is creative. It is not a statue in a museum, no; it is creative. It is a question of remaining faithful to the original source, striving to rethink it and express it in dialogue with the new social and cultural situations. It is firmly rooted, but the tree grows in dialogue with reality. This task of updating is all the more fruitful the more it is carried out by harmonizing creativity, wisdom, sensitivity to all and fidelity to the Church.<sup>17</sup>

The energy of the charism flows through every cell of the body of the Institute: every sister/brother is both bearer and expression of it. But not only that. The body of the Institute, as a living organism, also has its own “senses,” and among them, a “sense of the charism,” an intuition or “instinct,” to use the words of Pope Francis, that allows it to distinguish the fragrance of the charism, to perceive its melody, to glimpse its light, to taste its flavor, to recognize its touch. And to resonate in contact with it, to be drawn by it, and to follow it, as a body, as an organism. How important it is, then, that the *leader*, like the Good Shepherd, walks with the flock:

in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support; and at the back in order to keep it united and so that no one lags too, too far behind, to keep them united. There is another reason too: because the people have a “nose!” [for the scent of charism]<sup>18</sup>

The vibration and movement of an organism in response to what its “instinct” and all its senses perceive is not simply the sum of the vibrations and movements of each of its parts; it is much more. It is like what happens in a symphony performed by an orchestra: it is not merely the sum of the individual sounds of the instruments; it is something far greater. Speaking to the new Cardinals during the Consistory of September 2023, Pope Francis used precisely this image, linking it to the reality of synodality:

the College of Cardinals is called to resemble a symphony orchestra, representing the harmony and synodality of the Church. I also say “synodality”, not only because we are on the eve of the first Assembly of the Synod that has precisely this theme, but also because it seems to me that the metaphor of the orchestra can well illuminate the synodal character of

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<sup>17</sup> FRANCIS, *Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement*, Vatican February 6, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> FRANCIS, *Meeting with Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Members of Pastoral Councils*, Assisi October 4, 2013.

the Church. A symphony thrives on the skillful composition of the timbres of different instruments: each one makes its contribution, sometimes alone, sometimes united with someone else, sometimes with the whole ensemble. Diversity is necessary; it is indispensable. However, each sound must contribute to the common design. This is why mutual listening is essential: each musician must listen to the others. If one listens only to himself, however sublime his sound may be, it will not benefit the symphony; and the same would be the case if one section of the orchestra did not listen to the others, but played as if it were alone, as if it were the whole. In addition, the conductor of the orchestra is at the service of this kind of miracle that is each performance of a symphony. He has to listen more than anyone else, and at the same time his job is to help each person and the whole orchestra develop the greatest creative fidelity: fidelity to the work being performed, but also creative, able to give a soul to the score, to make it resonate in the here and now in a unique way.<sup>19</sup>

The *leader* is called to facilitate a continual return and re-immersion into the charism, into the vital energy that animates the Institute, into the music that sustains it, into the living and vibrant origins from which it is always possible to begin again. This allows the Institute to be renewed in the present by the inexhaustible fruitfulness of the inspiration from which it was born. Such a constant dynamism, of returning and being sent forth again, enables the Institute to live discernment as a way of life: a continual mirroring of itself in the charism, a continual immersion in it, so as to requalify the mission in light of the present moment; so that the music of the charism may be expressed today by the orchestra, bringing life and soul to the score here and now; so that the vital flow may be freed from any superstructures, rigid geographies, geometries, or patterns that might seek to imprison its dance. A living organism is, by its nature, always in motion, in adaptation, in renewal. When movement, adaptation, and renewal cease, death sets in. To quote Pope Francis once more:

Those who are standing still end up corrupting themselves. Like water: when water is standing still there, mosquitoes come, lay eggs, and everything becomes corrupted. Everything.<sup>20</sup>

## 6. MEND THE NETS

During the retreat at the beginning of the second session of the Synod Assembly, I was particularly struck by Fr. Radcliffe's meditation on the "Resurrection Catch of Fish" (Jn 21:1-11) and some of his comments on fishing nets. At one point, Fr. Radcliffe, speaking of the fishing net as a symbol of the Church, which welcomes personal and cultural diversity, said:

We await a new Pentecost in which each culture speaks in its own native tongue and is understood. This is also our task during the Synod and the foundation of our mission to our torn and divided world. We ask for the prayers of Mary, untier of knots, and Peter, the mender of nets!<sup>21</sup>

I then went to read the excerpt from Mk 1:16-20:

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<sup>19</sup> FRANCIS, *Homily at the Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals*, Vatican September 30, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> FRANCIS, *Homily*, Chapel of the Casa Santa Marta, October 2, 2018. <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/papa-francesco/messa-santa-marta/2018-10/papa-francesco-santa-marta-02-ottobre-angeli-bambini.html>

<sup>21</sup> T. RADCLIFFE, *Resurrection Fishing*, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops – Second Session, Meditation during Retreat, October 1, 2024.

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

It’s true, I said to myself, nets are not only meant to be cast or dragged ashore; they must also be repaired, mended. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe pointed out how a fishing net is made up of two things: spaces and the threads that surround and connect them. That is it. If the connections break or become so dense that they close off the spaces, the net ceases to be a net, and it catches nothing.

The net breaks. And it must be repaired constantly and faithfully. To mend, to stitch, to reweave are artisan tasks. They are done by hand, not by machines. They require care and a great deal of sensitivity. The net and the fabric must be held in your hands. The eyes search out the holes, the torn links, the frayed threads. The fingers touch, open, clean, and seek out the strong and healthy connections to which new links can be attached and the net rebuilt.

I deeply believe that a dimension to which anyone entrusted with a service of authority must pay particular attention is precisely this: the repairing of the nets on many levels. But this work of mending is not only the task of those in authority. It concerns all of us as a pathway of hope.

Pope Francis, in *Dilexit nos*, gives significant space to this idea of repair.<sup>22</sup> There is a form of repair that involves the structures of sin when repeated sins against others solidify and crystallize into visible or invisible structures that reproduce and perpetuate toxic and unhealthy dynamics (cf. DN, 183).

Frequently, this is part of a dominant mind-set that considers normal or reasonable what is merely selfishness and indifference (DN, 183). It is not only a moral norm that leads us to expose and resist these alienated social structures and to support efforts within society to restore and consolidate the common good. Rather, it is our “conversion of heart” that “imposes the obligation” to repair these structures. It is our response to the love of the heart of Jesus, which teaches us to love in turn. (DN, 183).

But

Christian reparation cannot be understood simply as a congeries of external works, however indispensable and at times admirable they may be. These need a “mystique”, a soul, a meaning that grants them strength, drive and tireless creativity. They need the life, the fire and the light that radiate from the heart of Christ (DN, 184).

Nor is a merely outward reparation sufficient, either for our world or for the heart of Christ. If each of us considers his or her own sins and their effect on others, we will realize that repairing the harm done to this world also calls for a desire to mend wounded hearts where the deepest harm was done, and the hurt is most painful (DN, 185).

Not everything can be mended, nor can everything be completely repaired. But the process of repair can pave the way for a rebirth, a new understanding and reframing of the wound that can make it less painful and open it to paths of light.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. FRANCIS, *Dilexit nos* – Encyclical Letter on Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ, Rome, 24 October 2024, especially nn. 181-204.

In DN, Pope Francis highlights some steps in the process of reparation:

- ✚ The heart's intention (cf. DN, 185-186): it is the deep desire for reparation, the intention to repair the damage caused and to do so concretely, that is, to implement the necessary and appropriate steps.
- ✚ Acknowledging guilt, honestly acknowledging the harm done to the brother/sister, feeling a deep and sincere feeling that love has been hurt (cf. DN, 187) and letting this move the heart to healthy, true, purifying sorrow.
- ✚ Asking forgiveness from our brother/sister. Asking forgiveness is a means of healing relationships, for it "re-opens dialogue and manifests the will to re-establish the bond of fraternal charity... It touches the heart of our brother or sister, brings consolation and inspires acceptance of the forgiveness requested. Even if the irreparable cannot be completely repaired, love can always be reborn, making the hurt bearable" (DN, 189).

The second session of the Synod Assembly began with two days of retreat, which concluded with a Penitential Vigil during which

feeling our shame, we asked forgiveness for our sins, and we lifted up our prayers for the victims of the evils of the world. We identified our sins: against peace, against Creation, against indigenous peoples, migrants, children, women, and those who are poor, in our failure to listen and to seek communion. We were brought to a renewed understanding, namely, that synodality requires repentance and conversion.<sup>23</sup>

A conversion to forgiveness to ask, to give, to receive. A conversion to recognize and repair the structures and dynamics of sin in us, among us and around us, to mending wounded hearts, to repairing the bonds, the networks that unite us as brothers and sisters.

The Church needs to listen with special attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons with Church appointments. Listening is a fundamental element of the path to healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation. At a time characterized by a global crisis of trust, which encourages people to live in distrust and suspicion, the Church must acknowledge its own shortcomings. It must humbly ask for forgiveness, must care for victims, provide for preventative measures, and strive in the Lord to rebuild mutual trust.<sup>24</sup>

## 7. ARTISANS OF PEACE

Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025, 12 noon: Pope Francis, from the Central Loggia of the Vatican Basilica gives his blessing to the city, to humanity and creation, and offers the *Urbi et Orbi* Message to the Church and the world. Little did we know that it was his last Message and the last blessing of his life on this earth.

In his last message to us, Pope Francis wanted to emphasize the profound meaning of the Lord's resurrection, in which our hope is rooted:

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<sup>23</sup> DF, 6.

<sup>24</sup> DF, 55.

Love has triumphed over hatred, light over darkness and truth over falsehood. Forgiveness has triumphed over revenge. Evil has not disappeared from history; it will remain until the end, but it no longer has the upper hand; it no longer has power over those who accept the grace of this day.

Sisters and brothers, especially those of you experiencing pain and sorrow, your silent cry has been heard and your tears have been counted; not one of them has been lost! In the passion and death of Jesus, God has taken upon himself all the evil in this world and in his infinite mercy has defeated it. He has uprooted the diabolical pride that poisons the human heart and wreaks violence and corruption on every side. The Lamb of God is victorious! That is why, today, we can joyfully cry out: “Christ, my hope, has risen!” (*Easter Sequence*).

The resurrection of Jesus is indeed the basis of our hope. For in the light of this event, hope is no longer an illusion. Thanks to Christ — crucified and risen from the dead — hope does not disappoint! *Spes non confundit!* (cf. Rm 5:5). That hope is not an evasion, but a challenge; it does not delude, but empowers us.

All those who put their hope in God place their feeble hands in his strong and mighty hand; they let themselves be raised up and set out on a journey. Together with the risen Jesus, they become pilgrims of hope, witnesses of the victory of love and of the disarmed power of Life.<sup>25</sup>

In the same message, the Holy Father once again made strong appeals for peace, recalling the too many areas of the world oppressed by conflicts, violence and tensions: among them the Holy Land, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, the South Caucasus, the Sahel, South Sudan, Sudan, the Horn of Africa, the DRC, and the Great Lakes Region.

Pope Leo XIV, in his first words after his election as Supreme Pontiff on May 8, 2025, took up the call for peace:

Peace be with you all!

Dear brothers and sisters, these are the first words spoken by the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for God’s flock. I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world. Peace be with you!

It is the peace of the risen Christ. A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally.<sup>26</sup>

We may ask: How can consecrated life live out this call –almost a testament– of Pope Francis, echoed by Pope Leo XIV? How can it open paths of a “challenging” and “empowering” hope? How can it be a sign of the “unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering peace that comes from God?” How can we truly “become pilgrims of hope, witnesses of the victory of Love, of the disarming power of Life?” How can we truly become “artisans of peace?”<sup>27</sup>

I believe the answer lies precisely here, among us, in the Kingdom that is coming, or rather, that is already present like a tiny mustard seed that becomes a tree and offers shelter to the birds, like the

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<sup>25</sup> FRANCIS, “*Urbi et Orbi*” Message, Easter 2025, Vatican, April 20, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> LEO XIV, First “*Urbi et Orbi*” Blessing, Vatican, May 8, 2025.

<sup>27</sup> “Artisans of peace” is an expression repeatedly used by Pope Francis. See, for example, his *Message for the celebration of the 53<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2020

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191208\\_messaggio-53giornatamondiale-pace2020.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20191208_messaggio-53giornatamondiale-pace2020.html)

yeast hidden in the dough, like the persistence and love of the shepherd who tirelessly searches for the lost sheep and of the woman who sweeps the house to find the missing coin. Like Jesus who, meeting his disciples after the Resurrection, does not present himself with special effects or displays of power, but with the disarming and astonishing strength of wounds that have become radiant signs of forgiveness. With the burning and respectful desire to remain with them, never tiring of offering, with faithfulness and gentleness, the Love capable of rising again, of arising, when opposing forces attempt to extinguish it or turn it into revendication or revenge.<sup>28</sup>

Let us look at so many consecrated women and men, scattered across the world, often in places where humanity is most wounded, in the depths of history and of human existence, on the peripheries and frontiers, weaving the threads of this peace that is both disarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. Let us look at so many consecrated persons who not only freely give their lives, but also freely offer their death, making every fragility, every vulnerability, every suffering, every act of surrender incredibly fruitful and blessed, living in their very flesh, both as individuals and as communities, the height of the Paschal Mystery.<sup>29</sup> Silently, patiently, with the care of artisans, they become guardians of life. They weave and repair it and help make the world more human and compassionate, building with patience and determination a culture of care.

## 8. FRAGILE SIGNS OF HOPE

Algeria. It is the night between March 26 and 27, 1996. Christian de Chergé, Bruno Lemarchand, Célestin Ringiard, Christophe Lebreton, Luc Dochier, Michel Fleury, and Paul Favre-Miville: seven Trappist monks from the Monastery of Our Lady of Atlas are abducted by kidnappers whose motives are still unknown. The victims' heads are found at the end of May near Medea, not far from the monastery. On December 8, 2018, the monks of Tibhirine were beatified in Oran, along with twelve other martyrs of Algeria, killed between 1994 and 1996. They bore witness to their fidelity to God, to a land and to a people, persevering to the end in the spirit of brotherhood.<sup>30</sup>

One day, in July 1994, two years before the bloody end of the lives of the seven monks of Tibhirine, Mohammed, the Muslim guardian of the Algerian monastery of Our Lady of Atlas, asked Brother Christophe for hooks to pull potatoes from the garden. Speaking of their work together, he said, "You know, it's like the same blood flows through us, irrigating us together." "So – commented Christophe, the youngest of the monks – for him too, blood speaks above all of life, of life that is shared and communicated."<sup>31</sup>

Christian's spiritual testament begins with these words:

If it should happen one day - and it could be today - that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. PASOLINI, R., *Knowing How to Rise Again*, Third Lenten Homily for the cycle: "Anchored in Christ. Rooted and founded in the hope of new Life," Vatican April 4, 2025.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. MUNLEY, A. (Ed.) *Learnings from the Journey: The LCWR Leadership Team Interviews—Findings, Implications, and the Persistent Call to Transformation*, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. PALERMO, A. *The Spiritual Legacy of the Monks of Tibhirine Abducted 25 Years Ago*, in Vatican News, March 26, 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/chiesa/news/2021-03/l-eredita-spirituale-dei-monaci-di-tibhirine-rapiti-25-anni-fa.html>

<sup>31</sup> FALASCA, S., *Algeria. The Simple Lesson of the Martyrs of Tibhirine*, in Avvenire, November 21, 2018, <https://www.avvenire.it/agora/pagine/martiri-di-tibhirine-monaci-trappisti-semplicemente-cristiani-lev>

community, my Church and my family to remember that my life was 'given' to God and to this country. He continues: "my death will appear to confirm those who hastily judged me naïve or idealistic: "Let him tell us now what he thinks of his ideals!" But these persons should know that finally my most avid curiosity will be set free. This is what I shall be able to do, God willing: immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him His children of Islam just as He sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of His Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and restore the likeness, playing with the differences.

Mogadishu, Somalia, September 17, 2006: Sister Leonella Sgorbati, a Consolata Missionary, is killed as she leaves the pediatric hospital where she works. Seven bullets strike her. Before dying, recognizing the one who shot her, she whispers: "Do not harm him, he is a poor boy." And she ends her life by pronouncing the most sublime words of the Christian experience: "I forgive, I forgive, I forgive..." Sister Leonella was beatified in 2018. She was spiritually very close to the experience of the Monks of Tibhirine.

Kamenge, Burundi, September 8, 2014: Bernardetta, Olga, and Lucia, Xaverian Missionary Sisters, are brutally murdered during the night. "They were three elderly missionaries with serious health problems who had just returned to Burundi because they longed to be back with their people," recounts Giordana, the General Director of the Xaverian Missionary Sisters in Parma.<sup>32</sup> On October 1, 2013, as she was leaving Parma to return to Burundi, Lucia said:

I am going back to Burundi, at my age and with a weak and limited body that no longer allows me to run day and night as I once did. Yet inwardly, I believe I can say that the passion and the desire to remain faithful to Jesus' love for me, by embodying it in the mission, is always alive.<sup>33</sup>

The list could go on. But let us stop here. The monks of Tibhirine lived a very simple life, woven with prayer, work, and fraternal sharing with the people. Far from the spotlight, from any kind of noise or power. Intense lives, humble, sober, passionate. Leonella was 66 years old and had several health issues when she was killed on a street in Mogadishu. For years, together with other sisters in Somalia, she had lived under the bombs of a senseless war, protected not by concrete bunkers or armored cars but by her passion for Jesus Christ, by the sisterhood that united her with the other missionaries with whom she shared her life, and by her love for the people. Bernardetta, Olga, and Lucia were 79, 83, and 75 years old when murderous rage tore them away from the people they had chosen to return to, despite their clear fragility due to age and poor health.

We might ask ourselves why hatred, violence, and Evil are unleashed against such vulnerable, fragile, defenseless beings, so far from the power structures, so far from the pursuit of visibility, strength, triumph, or fame. Who could such lives possibly threaten? Probably they trouble and frighten Evil itself, precisely because they are completely vulnerable and yet extraordinarily strong in spirit. They are filled with God, inflamed by His Fire. Too similar to the Lamb of God, defenseless and humble, who takes upon Himself the pain, the illness, and the sin of the universe and gives back consolation, healing, forgiveness, salvation. There is a kind of fragility inhabited by God that frightens Evil. It disturbs Evil. It makes it tremble. Evil is not afraid of power, success, triumph, fame, strength, or domination. These are the things Evil thrives on and feeds upon. But Evil is thrown off

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<sup>32</sup> [https://parma.bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/09/07/news/due\\_missionarie\\_saveriane\\_uccise\\_in\\_burundi-95229424/](https://parma.bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/09/07/news/due_missionarie_saveriane_uccise_in_burundi-95229424/)

<sup>33</sup> [https://parma.bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/09/07/news/due\\_missionarie\\_saveriane\\_uccise\\_in\\_burundi-95229424/](https://parma.bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/09/07/news/due_missionarie_saveriane_uccise_in_burundi-95229424/)



balance before humility, before forgiveness, before loving surrender, before passionate self-emptying, before obedience to Love just as Christ did. Until the very end. Until the supreme Hour when Love reveals its gentle and overwhelming strength by absorbing all hatred and violence and giving back only mercy, forgiveness, and tenderness. Yes, Evil is afraid of fragility that is filled with God and given entirely to Love. Before this, Evil has no weapons and loses control.

In April 2018, during Easter week, I was in Kabul, Afghanistan, with a fellow sister, visiting the Intercongregational women's community that was running a small school for children with disabilities from disadvantaged social backgrounds. Sadly, the project had to come to an end with the arrival of the Taliban in Kabul in August 2021. Together with the two sisters who were present at the time, belonging to different Congregations and from two different continents, we went to celebrate Easter at the only Catholic chapel in Afghanistan, located within the Italian embassy. There resided the ecclesiastical superior responsible for the *Missio sui Iuris* in Afghanistan, a Barnabite priest. To reach the embassy from the outskirts where we were staying, we took a taxi and crossed the city. The embassy district was, of course, heavily militarized. But both the Afghan soldiers and the foreign troops already knew the sisters, so we encountered no resistance as we passed through. When we arrived at the Italian embassy, we met a few soldiers from the nearby NATO base, who had also come to attend Mass. The base was just a few hundred meters from the embassy, a short walk. I couldn't help but notice, with emotion, the striking contrast between the soldiers' presence and that of the sisters, starting with their appearance. On one side, the NATO soldiers, tall and strong, moved with heavy steps, fully equipped as per protocol: camouflage uniforms, bulletproof vests, helmets, visors, heavy boots, utility belts, assault rifles slung over their shoulders. It took them a while to set aside some of this gear before entering the chapel a bit more lightly. Right nearby stood the sisters, radiant and fragile women, simply wrapped in light Afghan fabrics and a delicate Islamic-style headscarf, wearing a crucifix around their necks, carefully hidden beneath their flowing robes like a precious treasure. I was reminded of the image of David, the young boy who, after removing the armor King Saul had given him for protection, walked freely and unencumbered, armed only with stones and a sling, toward Goliath – the giant clad in bronze armor and helmet. He placed his trust not in himself or in weapons, but in his God (cf. 1 Sam 17:1–54). I will never forget the words of one NATO officer: "These two women, extraordinary, humble, and dedicated, do infinitely more for these people than all of us soldiers put together."

*We may ask ourselves: What moves me as I contemplate these "existential icons" written by consecrated men and women? What paths of hope do they trace?*

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May consecrated life truly always be a humble prophecy of forgiveness, of reparation, of the rebuilding of bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood, of peace, of trust, of communion. May it be a sentinel with senses sharpened and open to perceive in the night the breath of God, His gentle light, His whisper, His fragrance, His unmistakable taste, in order to welcome it, point it out, proclaim it, and walk the paths of hope that does not disappoint, because they are rooted in the Paschal Mystery, in the Heart of God.

Sisters, may this Assembly be a space that fosters processes of growth in the peace of the Risen One, in our hearts, among us, in our communities, in our ministries and services, in the synodal missionary Church, strengthening good networks, deep bonds, and processes of life, care, and mutual safeguarding.

Thank you! God bless you!