

*Paul J. Philibert, O.P.*

## **Reviving the Gifts of Our Founders: The Charisms of Religious in the Pastoral Life of the Church**

The Roman Synod of bishops, in addressing the “consecrated life,” provided important opportunities for the bishops to deepen their understanding of religious life. The 224 bishops who were members of this synod were accompanied by 59 women religious and 56 men religious (with 9 religious from other churches) participating as “auditores” or “adiutores.” Of the bishops, 94 were also religious. The speeches often called religious to live according to their charism. Cardinal Eyt of Bordeaux warned against seeing either male or female religious as a substitute workforce for the presbyterate of the local church. “What must come first,” said the cardinal, “is the charism of consecrated life itself in each congregation and each community” (Sweeny 1995, 8).

In the United States during the past thirty years since Vatican II, religious have been responsible for some of the most important initiatives for the revitalization of the Church’s pastoral life. But religious, like every other element in our extremely volatile culture, have also been shaped by the popular culture, the media, and the general drift of society in this same period of time. We need to be called again to attend to the primacy of our religious charisms.

Many institutes of men and women are facing crises in personnel and are recruiting fewer members each year than they lose by death or departures. This fact is also a notable dimension of our conversation. Like good stewards, religious superiors (along with their membership) have been reflecting about how to assure that the apostolic work, the spirituality, and the spiritual gifts of our religious societies may continue to bless the local church even as our numbers appear to diminish in a continuous decline.

The gifts of spiritual wisdom and apostolic orientation that religious received from their founders and foundresses are often referred to as *charisms*: a word coming from the Greek related to grace, graciousness, and the graced responsibilities given to individuals and to communities (Brennan 1994). The community or religious institute is the custodian of the charism. Individual members of our institutes embody the traditions and values of this charism. They make it possible for the charism to be known, appreciated, and received by the local church. What is it then, that makes the spirit, labor, and impact of a religious order or congregation to be distinctive and particular?

My argument, in general, goes as follows. The charisms of religious institutes are the continuation of the inspiration received by our founders and foundresses. They were religious geniuses whose faith interlocked with the culture of their time. They found ways to understand and address the spiritual and pastoral emergencies of their day, and in doing so to invest the wider Church with a sense of efficacy and hope. In almost every case, the charism of a religious institute not only shapes the mission and spirituality of its own members, but also inspires the apostolic and spiritual life of the surrounding Church.

Religious families are shaped by these charisms. By this, I mean that they are shaped by an *esprit de corps* that is based on spiritual imagery, the tradition of the order or congregation, the apostolic focus of the institute, and the religious passion of the founder. This spirit, when it functions well, stimulates pride, identification, and zealous personal investment by the members in something bigger than themselves.

Later on I will try to address the conflict between the frequently seen diocesan tendency to immortalize the pastoral status quo, on the one hand, and the new awareness by religious of our need for a rebirth in our charism. There are implications here for pastoral imagination and pastoral renewal within the local churches or dioceses. First, however, I will describe some features of Catholic pastoral life in this country and the role of apostolic religious within that pastoral reality.

#### THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

I believe we have lost ground in the last fifteen years in certain areas of American theological, pastoral, and religious life. I do not attribute this to Vatican II. Rather we religious, like the rest of the culture, have found ourselves caught up in agendas that have little to do with the vision of the Church as the coming kingdom of God and with our call to be corporate signs of grace within social and cultural life. Where, then, have we regressed?

The reform vision of liturgical renewal has fizzled. In the late sixties and early seventies we were much more deeply involved in the tough work of basic catechesis about the realities of the Christian sacramental life. There was much greater effort then to involve people in biblical catechesis, the renewal of the arts, and the development of non-Eucharist forms of liturgies of the word that gathered the assembly in the sacred space of the parish church.

Further, we have lost ground in the liturgical arts. The loss of *Jubilee* magazine, *Liturgical Arts Quarterly*, and the national Liturgical Week of the decades immediately before and following Vatican II have created a liturgical famine for Catholics. Even in publishing, there are fewer major studies being produced that deal with the depth dimension of our worship life (see, for example, Martos 1993). The most lively theme in liturgy today is not foundational catechesis, but inculturation. This is understandable in a Church with such great cultural diversity; but frequently such studies do not challenge local parishes to continuously examine their consciences about the integrity of their ritual life.

In addition, I believe that pastoral theology has lost its common touch with the family. In part this is because of the painful and seemingly insoluble divisiveness of issues surrounding reproduction ethics: contraception, abortion, in vitro fertilization, and similar themes. In any case, pastoral theology needs to address a substantive, nourishing, and hopeful vision of Christian life dealing with the single life, divorce, and families dealing with addiction, drugs, and alienation. The real concern is not that such theology is not being produced at all, but that so little of what is available finds its way into the pulpit. Our avoidance of social reality in pastoral education or in the pulpit and our failure to elaborate a vision of ordinary holiness in pastoral preaching is largely responsible for the indifference so many Catholics feel about their Christian life.

Another concern is the corporate dimension of Roman Catholicism. We have lost something of a sense of social affiliation and human solidarity with one another as believers and fellow worshipers in a pluralistic community. Since the 1950s, many of the elements that provide motivation for such affiliation and solidarity have disappeared. The majority of Catholics are no longer European immigrants. The majority are no longer blue collar workers struggling to make a living in an affluent WASP world surrounding them. In fact, Catholics are now the most successful single religious group in the upward-bound meritocracy of American commercial, economic, and cultural life. Andrew Greeley claims that there are more Catholics graduating from universities, continuing into graduate programs, and succeeding in this

country with higher salary compensations than any other denominational group (Greeley 1990, ch. 4). In any case, Catholics are no longer a cultural and religious minority and our sense of distinctiveness has been diminished, if not lost in the process.

This is not exclusively a loss. American Catholics have learned better about how to enter public debate, how to appreciate the positive role of other faith communities, and how to cooperate effectively with those who were culturally hostile at the turn of the century. Yet our own denominational solidarity and the loyalty that it used to generate have greatly diminished.

Perhaps one final example: clearly we have lost ground in the area of ecumenism. There was something hopeful and stimulating about the efforts at ecumenical relations in the sixties and seventies. Ecumenical theology and ecumenical pastoral collaboration reminded us in very tangible ways that the kingdom of God is larger than our ecclesiastical structures. The subtle quasi-idolatrous tendency of any bureaucracy, including the bureaus of our churches, to pump themselves up into institutional entities of divine stature seems to be rampant once again. Healthy ecumenism is an antidote to triumphalism, and we have witnessed a decline in practical ecumenism and a growth in triumphalism in the Catholic Church in the last decade.

What does this say to us about the status of the Church in which religious live and work? One possible response is that we have lost focus to some degree. The fundamental duty of the Church is to proclaim the gospel. Culturally, proclaiming the gospel means holding out a vision of all things being brought by grace into unity under the headship of Jesus Christ as our risen Lord and redeemer. We seem to have lost our ability to articulate the overarching vision of the grace of Christ as bringing many diversities into one graced unity. Many diverse communities form the one ecclesial body of faith, common baptism, and spirit life.

#### THE RELIGIOUS OF THE POST-VATICAN II PERIOD

Along with the question of our possibly having lost ground relative to the Church's pastoral life, there are the difficulties that have afflicted the culture of religious life for the last few decades. Some religious live their cultural and spiritual life in reaction to the formation that they received in the days before Vatican II, or, in the case of those who entered later, in reaction to stories of that earlier process of formation. Parallel to the media's occasional treatment of religious figures as pious ninnyes, some of the post-Vatican II generation of religious have come to view classical formation as unrelievedly dehumanizing and repressive.

Young religious have learned to say things like: “We are not nuns or monks; our formation is not monastic, we do not live in a Gestapo-like organization, obedience does not mean someone telling us what to do.”

It would be difficult to work out this theme with balance. But my point here is simple: many of the values of classical religious formation have either not been adequately experienced by a generation of religious or have been dismissed as negative values. As a consequence, some of the following qualities have not been maintained as substantial parts of our spiritual identity: silence as a divine language; sacred Scripture as a wellspring of faith and self-understanding; a rhythm of praise and work and contemplation as a kind of spiritual mechanism, larger than ourselves, that carries us through our days; and solidarity in a corporate identity larger than our individual interests. Clearly this topic could be the subject matter for extensive conversation and debate. I do not raise it principally to point out failure or to attribute fault, but rather to alert us to one role that religious life might and ought to play in this volatile moment of cultural transformation within the larger popular culture.

I acknowledge that the values of contemplation and prayerfulness have indeed been promoted by many recent books, workshops, retreats, and spiritual conferences. Yet some spiritual currents within American Catholic religious life today have too much in common with the New Age movement that focuses on spiritual experience as an individual interest, rather than an expression of corporate life. The foundational question is, who is the subject of the charism: the individual or the institute? If we are to reclaim our sense of the institute as the custodian of religious charism—with all the implications that may have for guiding the imagination, mission, and behavior of individuals within the institute—we will have to confront some of the problems of the spirit that I have tried to evoke in this section.

#### RELIGIOUS AND MINISTRIES

Others have observed that we have experienced in the last few decades a “Protestantizing” of our ministries.<sup>1</sup> The point is that there is a growing contrast between the kind of large institutional ministerial work that was characteristic of Roman Catholic religious four or five decades ago and the increasingly personal face-to-face focus in

<sup>1</sup>The point of this remark is not intended to discredit the emphasis described as characteristic of Protestant pastoral life in the United States, but rather to point out the distinction between two different approaches to doing pastoral work.

ministry that is more common today. Like all other citizens of our republic, religious, too, felt the same forces of conflict in the sixties and seventies that led to a loss of their confidence in both government and ecclesiastical institutions. At the same time that this loss of credibility diminished institutions' claims upon the loyalties of individuals, the popular culture presented us with heightened ideals of personal growth and fulfillment.

The psychologizing of maturity and the narcissistic focus of personal fulfillment came to us in the pages of our major popular magazines and weekly journals as well as by way of the television screen. Elsewhere I have argued that the overwhelming theme for pastoral and institutional renewal in the first fifteen years after the council was *relevance*: bringing our institutions into conversation and sympathy with the goals of the popular culture (Philibert 1994).

In the sixties and seventies, many religious needed the challenge to become more professional. The period after the council saw a remarkable outpouring of energies directed to the professional education of religious men and women. This same period led to our religious professionals becoming not only members of, but also leaders in professional, academic, educational, and even civic organizations. In 1950, it might have been exceptional for a religious to speak of a career. Now, however, the idea of career has taken on an almost normative quality for most apostolic religious. Consequently the career often gets in the way of the mission.

The days when a superior general in Rome would reach into the ranks of a province of religious in the United States to choose and assign someone to specialized missionary work on another continent seem to have shriveled away. Major superiors on a talent search know that when they receive the response, "Let me pray about this," the game is up. We have reduced the ministry of administration in our institutes to such a degree that obedience is more likely to be realized as polite conversation proposing possible options rather than a call, in the name of the gospel and of the institute, to give one's life in service for the good of the Church through the institute's symbols of mission and commitment.

On a more positive note, we have correctly come to understand obedience to be, more than anything, the listening in solidarity of the entire community to the word of God as refracted through the spirit of our institute's charism. Yet if that is to have formative impact upon the spiritual and ministerial life of individual religious, it must be more than a pious idea. We must grapple in honest conversation with the authoritative leadership that the statutes and constitutions of our institutes have given to those who hold office in the community.

Note that the authority mechanisms of religious institutes differ from foundation to foundation. Each institute must be true to its traditions, traditions that vary considerably from monastery to apostolic modern institutes. In all cases, however, listening and accountability are two-way streets. Superiors are obliged to be good listeners, as St. Benedict notes firmly in his Rule. Further, religious (and superiors especially) must be listening to the needs of the local church and the voice of the bishop, as well as to the gospel and the constitutions of the institute (see Seasoltz 1994, 73–93). The whole structure of ecclesial authority and obedience is frustrated when any one entity refuses to participate in serious and accountable dialogue with Christian partners in the responsible building of the local church.

#### REVIVING THE CHARISM

Why, you might ask, raise these embarrassing and debatable issues about the Church's pastoral life, the reactive spirituality of some post-Vatican II religious, and the individualization of religious ministries? Well, not to indulge in Jansenistic guilt or even in remorse. The real point is that we religious, like our lay colleagues in the Church, find ourselves influenced very deeply by the cultural changes around us. The main difference, however, is that we have resources within our traditions that can respond creatively to these cultural challenges. Let me point this out by arguing that we need to rehabilitate the vitality of our institutes on the basis of reviving their charism and their pastoral outreach to serve local churches. What is religious charism in pragmatic detail?

#### THE POWER OF CHARISM

Earlier I commented that religious families are shaped by the spiritual imagery of the institute. As an example, for Dominicans, this would allude to the fact that we came into being out of the need to address a particular moment of Church life where preaching had fallen into disuse or ineffectiveness. For St. Dominic, as for the sons and daughters of the Order of Preachers, therefore, a theology of the word of God is at the very heart of our self-understanding. Our life is one that should substantially integrate study and prayer, even as we are actively engaged in apostolic ministry (Tugwell 1979).

Dominican spiritual imagery of our order promotes vulnerability to the anointing of the Holy Spirit and awareness that this anointing usually takes place in silence, waiting, and theological conversation. In a Dominican understanding of pastoral service, the sacramental life of the Church flows from the word of God. Thus study of the word,

celebration of the word with special solemnity, and eagerness to share the multiple ways of breaking the bread of the word in preaching form part of the very structure of Dominican identity. If Dominicans lose this infatuation with the word of God, they have lost something essential to their *raison d'être*.

This charism is communicated through the tradition and lore of the Dominican tribe. Today that means a special concern for the complementary and solidarity of Dominican men and women along with Dominican laity in the apostolic life of the Church. The friars remember that it was a group of sisters that Dominic called together at the village of Prouille as the first Dominican community. Dominic's style was one of holy competition with heretical ascetics in what he called "apostolic life"—going about with no extra clothing, no extra baggage, just as Jesus described to the seventy-two disciples, bringing the word of God and the experience of faith to those to whom they preached (see Rausch 1992, 82–83; O'Malley 1988, 223–4). For Dominicans this means being constantly prodded by the radicalism of the commitment of Dominic and his early companions. In the same way the apostolic focus and passion of the founder, St. Dominic, remains normative even for our time. There have been recent movements within the order, such as the Dominican Leadership Conference and the Parable Conference for Dominican Life and Mission, that for fifteen years have tried to illuminate the centrality of preaching for all Dominican men and women. Happily, similar organizations exist for Jesuits, Benedictines, Franciscans, indeed, for almost all larger religious families in the American church. Such corporate collaboration is vital to our renewal and a powerful ecclesial sign of how the Holy Spirit is guiding our institutes to become a leaven in the local churches where we work.

Part of the charm and attractiveness of the way in which religious communicate with the local church arises from the way in which individual religious minister with loyalty, pride, and identification with the spirit of their founder and with the great figures of their tradition. Qualities like good preaching, hospitality, powerful active listening, sympathetic pastoral counseling, empowerment of groups tend to be associated with the pastoral effectiveness of religious in ministries in the local churches.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that religious generally live in common and become accustomed to listening more sympathetically than those who live alone. Perhaps it is due to the impact of common prayer and the beauty of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, if not common Eucharist, by the members of our houses. It may be due to a long-term concentration upon the spiritual tradition of a particular

religious family and its theology and spirituality. Here again is another topic worthy of extended consideration. Nonetheless, religious very often are able to impact upon the local church in such fashion as to invite people into a spiritual solidarity with the interests and challenges of their charism. This is one of the ways in which religious bring to the local church the power of their gospel witness.

#### PRAGMATIC CONFLICTS BETWEEN MINISTRY AND APOSTOLIC CHARISM

The LCWR and CMSM responses to the *Lineamenta* for the 1994 synod remarked upon the potential conflicts between diocesan bishops and our superiors and members relative to the utilization of our pastoral powers in the local church (*Origins* 1993, 724-7). It is impossible to generalize about American bishops and dioceses today. Some bishops have been extremely realistic about the pastoral crisis of the Church, while other bishops simply refuse to admit either that there is a personnel crisis or that there could ever be any alternatives to the Church's present discipline for ordination and pastoral administration. Just as there are some dioceses where the dialogues between the diocesan ordinary and major superiors are a pleasure and very substantive, so there are also other dioceses where such meetings are an embarrassment and a trivialization of the invitation extended in *Mutuae Relationes* to establish substantive conversation between religious and bishops about the future of religious life and religious apostolic ministries. So I cannot generalize. However, the problem is general enough that we must raise the question of the conflict with bishops whose vision of diocesan pastoral life is the immortalizing of the status quo.

In some places the local parish does little more than provide sacramental services to people who are over-Eucharistized and under-catechized. We continue to invite people to Sunday Mass or, if no priest is available, to a communion service in its place. We too frequently suppose that by osmosis they receive an initiation into the word of God, deep prayer, and a substantial understanding of the Church's theology, while we continue to reinforce an approach to ritual life that is nonreflective and superstitious.

A note must be added about the RCIA. In the American church, we have been able to incarnate and embody the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in such fashion as to be a genuine transformation of the whole parish community in many cases. The North American Forum on the Catechumenate has become an extraordinary force for renewal, and the journal *Catechumenate* is just one example among others of

extraordinarily fine teaching and commentary on the rite and on the process of initiation. But the phenomenon of the parish revived through the RCIA is an exception within the mass experience of Roman Catholicism in the United States today. Even in parishes where the RCIA is vital and functioning, frequently the priest of the community may be either unsympathetic or unskilled at detonating the spiritual potential built up through community and catechesis.

Where does this leave us? We cannot simply endorse the status quo. We have to be advocates of a rethinking of the title to ministry in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> The continuation of business as usual, intensified by the pressure of concern about ordained personnel, has become a distraction from deeper issues: What is spiritual maturity? What is authentic catechesis? How can those who are not alive in the word of God come to the Eucharistic table? How dare we ignore the survival of a culture of totem and superstition in a Church whose very life is the anointing of the spirit and obedience to the word of God? If these questions are overdrawn (and certainly they are overdrawn for some fine parishes), nonetheless the values they point to are of such significance that I feel justified in raising them.

#### RELIGIOUS CHARISMS AT THE SERVICE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In response to the *Lineamenta* for the synod of 1994, the major superiors of CMSM replied that they thought it would be unwise for the synod to proceed with an analysis of religious life under a genus and species distinction, suggesting that there is one generic reality that is religious life and that different institutes vary simply as different species of the one genus. So it would be unwise to imagine that the revitalization and elaboration of a new rebirth of charism for different institutes could be uniform. It could not be exactly parallel in all institutes. Rather, using the suggestive comments that I have developed so far, I would say that we need to be challenged in reviving the gifts of our founders by the following argument.

The Church is undernourished in its understanding of the core mystery of the body of Christ. Because of pressures from the popular culture and because of pressures in personnel or administration, much of our attention in recent decades has gone into the business and man-

<sup>2</sup>The lingering influence of what Thomas O'Meara calls a monofarm understanding of priesthood as the only ministry creates pastoral dysfunction in many places. Like many other theologians today, O'Meara sees the fundamental role of the presbyter to be the resourcing and enabling of the ministries of the baptized. See his *Theology of Ministry* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983).

agement side of our churches and our schools. Our people have known a kind of symbolic and ritual malnutrition. The popular culture has tilted us in the direction of emphasizing fanfare and chatty folksiness in the structure of our liturgical practice, allowing the sense of the sacred and the discipline of encounter with a transcendent God in anointed silence to fall either into the background or out of the picture altogether. As a consequence, the experience of coming to church on Sunday is a bit like the experience of going to the mall on Saturday. Individuals are likely to come as isolated consumers, looking for something that is interesting, buying what appeals, and walking away from the rest. The sense that Christians have a responsibility to be there to make a corporate sign of the coming kingdom of God both before God and before the world has been lost.

For our own survival as religious institutes, we must rediscover our roots in mysticism, contemplation, and corporate solidarity in obedience to the gospel. Clearly this is not just a matter of institutional narcissism. It is not just so that we may survive. We believe that God raised up our founders to bring into the Church the riches of our traditions. This present age of the Church particularly needs the witness of our corporate solidarity, our modeling of the rhythm of a life shaped by the proclamation of the word of God, the response of praise, and the overflow of apostolic compassion. What has already become distinctive for many institutes—particularly those with associate memberships—is that we have learned to exercise a particularly gracious form of hospitality that brings inside our communities those who have not made vows with us, but who share with us our spiritual and apostolic goals.

#### TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

What are some possible conclusions from this reflection?

(1) In the ongoing renewal of our institutes, we need to be guided by the spiritual needs of the people of God in the local church as well as by our received understanding of our own charism. When one is in dialogue with another, the other can often illuminate through conversation the stream of reflection that we have already begun by ourselves. In this case, our dialogue with the local church will illuminate for us the particular ways in which our traditions are able to bring nourishment to the great opportunities for the gospel that are already budding on the ecclesial vine. Though I have not developed it explicitly, the theme of our solidarity with all the baptized is obviously of great importance in our understanding the way in which our charism will flow into the future ages of the Church's life.

(2) Religious will be alert to and sympathetic to the outcome of the Roman synod on religious life and to the Pope's apostolic exhortation, which summarizes the synod's deliberations.<sup>3</sup> This collegial act of the bishops of the world relative to our future was an important moment in the life within the Church influenced by the action of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, it is likewise vital for religious to acknowledge that we have a perspective on the Church's ecclesial reality and its apostolic needs that is very distinctive because of our traditions and our roles as religious.

It is important for us to become increasingly articulate with one another about our apostolic hopes and our analysis of the pastoral conflicts that we see in the dialectic between the retrieval of our traditions as religious institutes and our service of the diocesan bishops. Concretely, this will mean planning among ourselves about pastoral collaboration that is coherent with our charisms and that will allow us to take initiatives as religious among our various institutes to serve the local churches. We must have as much interest in and compassion for the pastoral needs of the local dioceses as the diocesan bishops themselves do.

(3) We must strive to become the midwives of the new ecclesial reality of the ministry of the non-ordained. While many diocesan clergy and diocesan programs have done courageous and excellent work in this regard, the bulk of initiatives has fallen to religious and probably will continue to do so. We must not only invite people to help us out because of a crisis of personnel. We must become architects of thoughtful pastoral and theological planning for the future of a Church that will be very different. We probably will have to allocate our own resources—or use our influence to find resources—to properly educate and compensate those who enter into sharing, in the spirit of our charisms, the continuing apostolic work of our societies.

(4) We need to assist one another, especially through LCWR and CMSM in their regional meetings, in reexamining the spiritual treasures of our religious traditions. In 1989 the joint assembly of LCWR and CMSM produced a statement on the "Transformative Elements of Religious Life" for the year 2010. It is fascinating how much the themes of contemplation and sharing of charism entered into that statement,

<sup>3</sup>Sweeney comments: "During the Synod proper a positive approach won the day over some attempts to push a disciplinary agenda. So, if the final phase maintains this momentum, and the Pope has said he intends to involve religious men and women directly in preparing the Exhortation, the Synod should finally turn out as an event full of hope." See Sweeney, *Religious Life Review*, 3.

which was the relatively spontaneous eruption of conversation among major superiors of men and women.<sup>4</sup>

That statement was prophetic and right, in many regards. It demands from us serious work and action to retrieve elements integral to our spiritual discipline. This will not mean going back to repeat just what we did before Vatican II. It will mean, however, re-addressing the themes of corporate solidarity, the disciplines of silence, *lectio divina*, contemplative study, and the beautiful embodiment of our liturgical life. It is often true in our apostolic life that we grow in spiritual, theological, and pastoral disciplines precisely when that growth is required for our successful ministry. The Church now needs the witness of religious in these very areas.

The importance of the role of religious in promoting social justice reflects the truth that compassion is a constitutive aspect of mature Christian faith. In many dioceses, work for justice and advocacy for and ministry to the poor, migrants, and marginalized people characteristically falls to religious. This is in part because so many religious institutes were brought into being precisely in order to address urgent social needs and in part because diocesan personnel are preoccupied with parish structures. It seems obvious that the future will emphasize even more this division of labor between religious and diocesan clergy. Our awareness of this fact and our responsiveness to the needs of the poor and the outcast will be integral to our success at reviving the gifts of our founders and reappropriating our ecclesial role in a graphically transformed Church.

We will find ourselves retrieving the integrity of our apostolic, spiritual, and contemplative traditions precisely because the culture needs a witness from us to a Christian life deeply rooted in the gospel. Pope John Paul II has frequently exhorted the Church to become more sensitive to the role of Christian witness in society. In *Christifideles Laici*, he indicated the special role of the laity in the “evangelization of the culture” (John Paul II 1989). The implementation of this positive vision of evangelizing action by the laity in the context of all that is ordinary points up a major role that religious will have to play in the decades that lie ahead of us. Here we have an image both of the critical frontier for apostolic energies of both religious and laity and of the sympathetic

<sup>4</sup>“Transformative Elements for Religious Life in the Future,” developed by the 1989 Joint CMSM/LCWR Assembly in Louisville, Ky. (private publication). The first five elements are: prophetic witness, contemplative attitudes toward life, poor and marginalized persons as the focus of ministry, spirituality of wholeness and global interconnectedness, and charisms and mission as sources of identity.

solidarity that is needed of us as religious to foster lay effectiveness in realizing this apostolic objective.

For eons, religious have understood their role in the Church as a present investment of living life energies in a witness to the enduring mystery of eternal life; this is our eschatological horizon. The spirituality of this eschatological witness is that of the paschal mystery: entering death in trust that God will transform the shards of our temporally conceived projects into vessels of divine life. It is with such a spirit that North American religious today face the challenges of inadequate recruitment, institutional crises, and conflict with Church administrators and laity who are attuned to expectations of us that are neither possible nor any longer desirable. Like prudent stewards, we ask what is likely to be the shape of our shared future. Like chosen servants of the gospel, we ask how we may best foster the life that rises out of all the dying around us. This is how we will revive the gifts of our founders and foundresses.

## REFERENCES

- Brennan, Margaret. "Transforming Life: The Charism of Religious Life." *Living in the Meantime: Concerning the Transformation of Religious Life*, ed. Paul Philibert, 154–7. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994.
- Greeley, Andrew M. *The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990.
- John Paul II. *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People: Christifideles Laici*. Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1989.
- Martos, Joseph. "A Decade of Liturgy and Worship: A Review of Books in Print." *New Theology Review* 6:4 (Nov. 1993) 54–78.
- Origins* 22:42 (1993).
- O'Malley, John W. "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life: Some Historical and Historiographical Considerations." *Theological Studies* 49 (1988).
- Philibert, Paul. "Editor's Introduction." *Living in the Meantime: Concerning the Transformation of Religious Life*, ed. Paul Philibert. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994.
- Rausch, T. P. *Priesthood Today: An Appraisal*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1992.

Seasoltz, R. Kevin. "Religious Obedience: Liberty and Law." *Living in the Meantime: Concerning the Transformation of Religious Life*, ed. Paul Philibert. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994.

Sweeny, James. "The Synod: Was It Worth It?" *Religious Life Review* 34 (1995) 3-16.

Tugwell, Simon. *The Way of the Preacher*. Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1979.

---

*Paul J. Philibert, O.P., is director of the Institute for Church Life and associate professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. This article was presented in somewhat altered form at a symposium on religious life sponsored by the Washington Theological Union.*