

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

« You are my friends... »

(Jn 15, 14)

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Introduction

This year, we have decided to study the long-expected Church-proposed text “Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church”. Its composition dates back to Pope Benedict XVI who had asked the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) to take the necessary steps to promote a better understanding of the vocation of Brother. Therefore, we now have to study the proposed document and to be nourished by it. This document is addressed to bishops, priests and the whole Church as well. It is a most important opportunity which is given to us to delve more deeply into our own vocation.

In this circular letter, I shall not attempt to comment on this text. I shall rather try to highlight the centrality of Christ in our lives, in the light of our Rule of Life – which re-mains the fundamental document to understand our vocation – of Vita Consecrata, and of a few books and more recent articles.

Christ is the "cornerstone", the "head" of the building which is the Church, the sacrament of the coming Kingdom. He is the foundation of our life as Religious Brothers. John Paul II expressed this in the introduction to Vita consecrata: *“The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God*

the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one — are made constantly "visible" in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed to-wards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven."¹

The document on the identity of the Brother also insists on the Christological dimension of our vocation: *"In every time and place consecrated persons show their contemporaries the traits of Jesus with which he himself had made clear that the mystery of the Kingdom of God had broken into history. Visibility is achieved by a way of being present which reveals the charism of each religious family in the here and now. Therefore consecrated people should frequently ask themselves how to be witnesses of the Lord today. What kind of presence should we live so that the Lord Jesus can be seen, experienced, by people today? [...] The Religious Brother, and also the Religious Sister, make visible in the Church the face of brother Christ, "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29), creator of a new brotherhood which he established with his teaching and with his life."*²

We shall begin by noting, following Vatican II, that *"the human mystery takes meaning in the mystery of the incarnate Word"* (G. S. 22, 1). Thus we are invited to realize anew the infinite treasure of our dignity obtained in the "lowering" of the Son of God who took on our flesh. We will be astounded at the fact that every man of goodwill is affected by this truth of faith: *"For since Christ died for all and that the ultimate vocation of man is in fact unique, and indeed divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all, in a way known to God alone, the possibility of being associated to the paschal mystery"* (GS 22, 5).

¹ VC 1

² Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church, 15

This will lead us to see how the Brother, who must live at the heart of this world, is called to enter into the mystery of salvation. The Brother is invited to the "*radicalism of prophecy*" as underlined by Pope Francis to the Superiors General in 2013. He is a sign of Christ's presence. By his testimony much more than by his words, the Brother is pre-sent in the world in the manner of Christ himself. He is called to be, like John the Baptist, the one who points to Christ and invites all to direct their gaze upon Him and Him alone. Thus, he is in the world a light that guides the steps of those who walk in darkness: "*You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High: you will go before the face of the Lord, and you will prepare his ways*" (Lk 1, 76).

But no one is a prophet unless he is first a disciple. We will then hear our founder asking us to imitate Christ, to have His feelings, to love what He loved. Listening to what St. Paul asked the Philippians (Phil 2), we shall understand that we must let ourselves be transformed by the Spirit in order to adopt the ways of thinking, of feeling, of reasoning, of acting of Christ himself. Such is the grace we are invited to accept with gratitude and the task to undertake with perseverance so as not be lulled by the ways of thinking of the world. This is what Pope Francis often reminds us of.

We will see how the vows, especially the vow of consecrated chastity, draw us further into the likeness of Christ and make us partake of his "feelings". This will lead us to see how our vocation is prophecy of the coming Kingdom. Communion with Christ, imitation of Christ in his earthly life, more intimate union with Him take us to the path of fertility for the establishment of God's Kingdom in this world, a kingdom of love and peace. With this vow, we belong to Christ more intensely. This bond of love, insofar as it transforms our life, engenders the fruits of the Spirit.

We shall then contemplate the mystery of our life as prophecy of eternity already pre-sent and yet to come. It is by a life "magnetized"

by God that we can, together, witness to the meaning of existence to the world. We know how children and young people can be "dis-oriented" today when they have no reliable horizon in their lives. As for us, we know this horizon of light that illuminates our daily lives comprising joy or disappointment, success or apparent failures, suffering and inner struggles. Having the eyes and heart turned towards the eternity of love is not being cut off from the world; rather, it is being pulled towards the future of God as Pope Francis puts it: "*Our hope of possessing the Kingdom in eternity pushes us to work to improve the conditions of life on earth, especially those of the weaker brethren. May the Virgin Mary help us to be individuals and communities not buried in the present, or worse, nostalgic of the past, but stretched towards the future of God, towards the encounter with Him, our life and our hope*" (Angelus, August 7, 2016).

We shall end this brief journey by listening to Jesus again asking us the question: "Do you love me?". Each one will then be invited to answer Him, humbly and generously.

I

Christ, Saviour of the World.

"The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples... But for an overall picture of its essential characteristics, it is singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ's radiant face in the mystery of the Transfiguration" (VC 14).

In light of what John Paul II writes in *Vita Consecrata*, we know that we cannot understand the meaning of our vocation as Brother without first becoming aware of the centrality of Christ in our Christian faith, in the Church. For us Christians, the world finds its true meaning in Christ, God-Man, the triumphant Lamb.

"It seems to me that Scripture, and its summary in the book of the Apocalypse, teach us that time is neither cyclical, like the Greeks thought, nor linear, as the Jews believed. It has its center of gravity in the mystery of the slain and triumphant Lamb who now sits with

God"³. *"With Christ joy is constantly born anew,"* (EG 1) says Pope Francis.

Christ is the center of gravity of our life. There is nothing without Him. He is the fullness of life. On Him alone rest the foundations of the world. A Russian philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev⁴, shortly before his death in 1900, imagined a character who could be the emperor of the world. He asked Christians who did not trust him despite the good works he had done for mankind, *"What can I do for you, strange men? What do you want from me?"* An elder then rose and said, *"Great Emperor, the most precious thing to us in Christianity is Christ Himself, and everything is in Him. We know that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him ..."* What we value most is Christ, and Him alone. *"In Christianity as such, we find Christ and Him alone: here is a will often stated but poorly assimilated,"* Soloviev wrote. The elder concluded his response to the great emperor: *"What can you do for us? Confess before us that Jesus is the Son of God, that He came in the flesh, that He rose from the dead and that He will return in glory; confess this, and we will receive you as the forerunner of his second and glorious coming."*

Are we not here in the heart of the drama of this world seeking so much peace and brotherhood but seemingly not knowing which way to follow or what first steps to take? The will to live together in peace can only be shared by those who grasp what basically unites them. Instead, dividing forces sow confusion and fear, violence and self-centeredness. For us, Christ alone is the true answer to our fundamental questions. Without Christ the world cannot find rest. The poor themselves, without Him, remain poor. If they pull through, it

³ Noëlle Haussman, in NRT 138, 2016. Un vin nouveau pour la Vie consacrée ? Le cas des engagements temporaires ou à vie.

⁴ Cf. Micheline Tenace, during a conference to religious Formators in Rome, 2015, CIVCSVA Document.

is ultimately to find that the riches of this world do not quench the thirst for life that they carry within themselves.

Pope Francis' words remind us of this essential truth: *"The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades"* (EG 2).

We must then *"go out in the world with the heart of Christ"*⁵. Christ alone can make us fully human. Man and God, He is fully human and He shares his divinity with us. In Him is the fullness of our human and divine vocation. This is why we must say with Benedict XVI: *"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction"*⁶. Pope Francis expresses the same idea: *"We become fully human when we be-come more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?"* (EG 8).

"We glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh," (Ph 3, 3) says St. Paul, and he adds: *"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ"* (Ph 3, 8). For him, the encounter with Christ is not an abstraction, it is a very concrete and incredibly rich reality.

⁵ Title given by Micheline Tenace to the above-quoted conference.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 1

Christ is his happiness, his bliss. In Him, he has everything. Without Him, he is nothing. This is the meaning of his preaching because that is his faith.

Who today can say this with conviction? Who can announce to the world the coming of the Lord and the necessary conversion of heart to greet Him? Who can testify to the centrality of Christ, the only Savior, the only Lord? The profession of the evangelical counsels, today as always, is challenged to provide answers to these questions. When our projects are sterile because only too human, we are invited to a patient listening of the Spirit speaking in a light breeze on the desert roads of our world.

In this sense, the gift of our life, in Him, is offered for the salvation of the world. He Himself has given Himself once and for all, and He gives Himself at this very moment. Our yes following his call and in his footsteps cannot possibly be temporary. It is a gift forever, a total gift of love, so that the world may have life. We are called to be prophets of salvation. Pope Francis called upon the Superiors General in these terms: "Let's talk of radicalism, yes, but of radicalism in prophecy!" We must show that it is in Christ and in Him alone that the world is saved. In Him is the truth about man: "*Man is nothing, he is a miracle [...], he is a God, he is a nothingness surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God,*" said Cardinal Bérulle.⁷

"*We live at a time when the religious should show lucidity of thought more than boldness of will,*" said Father Saverio Cannistrà⁸. In any case, it is the lucidity of thought that can judiciously guide the boldness of the will. We must, therefore, always and again, attempt

⁷ Quoted in « *L'Homme, merveille de Dieu* », Father Bernard Sesboüe, Salvator, p. 55

⁸ Father Saverio Cannistrà, Superior General of the Discalced Carmelite Order, during a speech on the theme: *The prophecy of consecrated life*, May 2016, during a meeting of Superiors General in Rome.

to know who we are, what we are called to, whom we are the witnesses of and in what way we do witness. We need to stop, think and pray, because we are called "*to exterminate and to demolish, to build and to plant*" (Jer 1: 10). Such is the price to pay to truly be witnesses of Christ, the Savior of the world.



II

The “Being-in-the-World” of the Brother.

The religious consecration, by nature, is free from constraints. It is not bound by the hierarchical structure of the Church. Its vocation is not the transformation of the world. It has both a “*doxological and a prophetic value*”⁹. The religious Brother is a particularly strong sign of the invitation extended to all to participate in the Trinitarian life. In the Church, he is a baptised person like any other, but he distinguishes himself from the “lay faithful” by the “radicalism of his prophetic mission” to which he is called. His life and his words are a reflection of the perfect man who is Christ. In Him, all are called to the fullness of life. He finds on Him the whole of his existence. It is in the mystery of his humble and silent, arduous and self-giving existence that he bears witness to Christ to all who have eyes to see.

The religious Brother is called to be, in the world, the visible “sign” of the saving Lord. Today, in a world of instantaneous images bursting forth across distances, it is somewhat more difficult to grasp the presence and the action of One who does not show Himself. Our

⁹ Father Saverio Cannistrà, id.

hearts are attuned to the invisible when moved by a vibrant melody, a sublime landscape, an unfathomable face. But how can we evangelise the inner feelings that we then feel and that open us to something beyond ourselves? This “invisible something” that dwells within us draws us further into the truth about man. It helps us to discover that man is “a little more” than what can be observed. He is part of a mystery the limits of which are practically beyond his reach and the light of which extends way beyond all lights on the road of his life.

The Brother is in the world *“as if seeing the one who is invisible”* (He 11, 27) He relies on the One he knows unknowingly and whom he loves in the night of faith. He relies on no one else but God, and God alone. The created world is of interest insofar as it reveals the mystery of Christ. But for the Brother as for any man, this mystery is unfathomable. Only humility, patience and perseverance give access to it. Indeed, *“there is a not seeing and a not knowing that constitutes the way of being-in-the-world of a religious”*¹⁰ In her own way, Teresa of the Child Jesus expresses this fairly well in one of her poems: *“Leaning on, without any support”*.

Our witnessing to the world goes through a night of faith and of patience sustained by an ever loving God. If ever our vocation finds sustenance elsewhere, it will then have lost all meaning and appeal. Only in God can we clearly discern the signs of the time and the calls of the Spirit. It is not a matter of doing more things; it is a matter of waiting for God’s own chosen time. *“To make his oblation the source of a continuously fresh outflow, even in times of severe trial, the Brother leans on Christ, his Rock. Begging for a stronger faith, he stands firm in the hope he professes, and, grasped by the Lord Jesus, he forges ahead toward the final meeting with God, the joy of his youth”* (D 34), the Rule of Life admirably puts it.

¹⁰ Father Saverio Cannistrà, id.

This way of being in the world presupposes a loving relationship to it which implies great inner freedom. The world does not fashion us; we are called by Christ – not alone but with our Brothers – to show the world the way to true happiness. *“Every genuine community visibly united in his name announces the Kingdom of God”* (D 31). We possess within us the secret of the future of the world as a gift received. It is within and yet comes from elsewhere. We would wish to say, to shout: the world has no future without His having died and having risen from the dead.

Our educational Mennaisian charism finds its full meaning in this truth. As we read Father de la Mennais, we understand that his sole and unique concern was that the Brothers be “solidly pious masters” in whom children would recognise Christ himself and convert to Him making ready for the coming of a new world and a new earth. This is the ultimate meaning of our charism as religious Brothers, a charism which, today, we are called to share with Laypeople. The presence of the Brother in schools and educational centres, his “being-in-the-world”, testifies to a vocation that relies on Christ through the gift of one’s life. *“The religious consecration places the Brother under the divine influence so that he may bear much fruit. Dedicated in a special way to the service of others, he exercises a kind of spiritual paternity in the Church and cooperates with the Lord in making available to mankind the immeasurable riches of his paschal mystery”* (D 28). He thus witnesses to the fact that man cannot live but by gazing upon Christ in whom he can see, as in a mirror, what he is called to be.

“The eschatological tension that runs through religious life is, basically, a form of radical love for the world and history. Like Christ, the religious embraces them, takes them upon himself and with himself in the attempt and the hope of reaching the Kingdom together. In so doing, he embraces his own fragility and weakness, the history of his family, of his religious community, of his people, carrying the

fiery wish of a transfiguration and of a redemption that nourishes itself in contact with and in the presence of Jesus Christ.”¹¹

“Let nothing trouble you, let nothing frighten you, everything passes. God does not pass. Patience overcomes everything; he who has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices.” Such is the radical message of trust that Teresa of Avila carried and which dwelt deep in the hearts of our founders. Total patience and trust in Providence are the fundamental attitudes of the religious Brother who relies on God alone. This patient and radical trust are the expression of a great love for the world saved by God and tell of the Mercy springing from the heart of Christ for whom nothing or no one is ever lost. The Mercy of God is always at work. The “being-in-the-world” of the Brother is one of mercy. He does not judge and he believes that the good will win in the end. He knows in whom he trusts. He has no hesitation whatsoever in transmitting this truth which the world so needs to hear.

This way of being in the world without being of the world presupposes having experienced the centrality of Christ, an experience which every Brother must have had one day or another. God must have revealed Himself to him like a free gift giving access to an infinite Presence. He revealed Himself *“like someone else in me, more myself than me”*, in the words of Paul Claudel after having been moved by God in the Notre-Dame cathedral of Paris in 1886. Invisible love manifests itself in the inner recesses of our being like a hidden treasure for which we would sell everything to possess. Emboldened by such an experience, thinking of “what is above”, the Brother can thrust ahead on the road of a world waiting for the victory of the slain Lamb: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth”* (Col 3, 1-2).

¹¹ Father Saverio Cannistrà, id.

Obviously, the Brother in his difference, in the originality of his state of life, does not look to keeping himself apart from other vocations which represent such wealth for the Church. Neither does he attempt to assimilate to others to the point of disappearing in a nameless whole. He seeks to be fully what he is and joyfully reaches out to young people and adults. He fully trusts in the work of the Spirit in him. He loves God who acts through him and relates to all with an open and trusting heart. *“Others become the burden he bears with the love of the Good Samaritan”*¹². This is his own way of loving the world and it makes him happy. The prophetic thrust of his life is reinforced: young people and adults see in him a wealth of unsuspected love and hope. Of this we must be newly aware as we see with joy the Mennaisian Family incorporate Laypeople who, upon meeting us, discover the wealth of a life centred in Christ.

¹² Father Sevario Cannistrà, id.



III

Having the *Attitudes* of Christ Jesus.

To continue our quest for the centrality of Christ in our life as Brothers, let us now meditate on the first verses of the second chapter of the Letter to the Philippians. They make us delve into the mystery of Christ, Son of God, who came into our humanity to make us share in his divinity: “*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 2, 5), Paul asks the Philippians, beseeching them in Christ Jesus “*to make his joy complete*” (Ph 2, 1-2).

Paul continues this well-known Christological hymn through which he helps us to discern what are Christ’s attitudes that we must share: “*Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (Ph 2, 6-8).

Based on these texts, John Mary de la Mennais exhorted his Brothers with the words: "*Know but one thing: Jesus and Jesus crucified...¹³*". He asserted without hesitation: "*None of us will enter the bosom of God if he does not conform to the image of his Son... God wants to find in his miserable creatures the traits, if I may say, the figure, the living imprint of the One he has begotten before all ages¹⁴*". His advice to his Brothers on the occasion of the annual retreat was never to tire of "*going into the details and comparing the feelings of Jesus Christ to our own, our behaviour to his¹⁵*"

But let us go back to the letter to the Philippians and try to understand what it says. The Greek term "Phroneite" which is translated here as "feelings", means how to "feel", judge, think the realities of life, how to reason, decide and act too. Paul therefore invites us to enter into the thoughts and actions of the Son of God, of God himself as Son. He tells us: have the same thoughts, the same way of feeling of Christ, the Son of God. To Corinthians, Paul says: "*We have the mind of Christ*" (1 Cor 2, 16), not the spirit of the world.

We are before a great mystery. Are we worthy of such a call? How can we have "the mind of Christ" in us. It is not only a matter of imitating Jesus in his humanity, in the humiliation and suffering of a man. Or rather, if it comes to that, it is knowing in faith that this man is the Word of God made flesh. So we have to make our own the "feelings" of the God of Jesus Christ whose "*thoughts are not our thoughts.*"

Through our baptism, and in a specific way, through our religious consecration, we have already entered into the Son's feelings of love for the Father and for the men He has created and wants to save. These feelings of love are expressed through obedience that goes as

¹³ S VIII, 2525

¹⁴ S VII, 2172

¹⁵ S VIII 2470

far as the total gift of self. Jesus, who does not see his divinity as a privilege, invites us to love like Him. Can we understand the scope of this call?

“Consecrated persons profess that Jesus is the model in whom every virtue comes to perfection. His way of living in chastity, poverty and obedience appears as the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth, a way which may be called divine, for it was embraced by him, God and man, as the expression of his relationship as the Only-Begotten Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit” (VC 18). To feel, think, love and act like sons; to feel, think, love and act like the Son of God, there’s our vocation. In our human flesh, we are called to give expression to the Spirit of Jesus, Son of God ... to allow the being of the Son of God to shine. This is not a privilege; we do not draw personal glory from this. We know how we are "earthen vessels", weak, fragile and sinful, and that we need more than others his Mercy. We receive this vocation as a call to come out of ourselves and to give ourselves freely in love. “The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called” (VC 20).

More than an imitation that depends only on our strength, we realise that it is a participation in the divinity of the One who became one of us in an act of perfect obedience to the Father. The Son loves the Father and loves his work of redemption for sinful humanity. It makes us participate, through grace, in his filial obedience which is the right position that we must have before the Father and our fellowmen.

To "feel" the realities as the Son is a gift from the Holy Spirit even before it is a task to accomplish. Jesus makes us his brothers and takes us by the hand to make us love the way he does. Through baptism and our religious consecration, we enter into the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. We participate in his relationship as the Son of the Father. We let ourselves be transformed by his own

way of judging, of seeing and of deciding. In Him and through Him, our gaze is changed radically: "Now we do not know anyone in the flesh" (2 Cor 2, 16), but in the manner of Christ. If we rely on purely human knowledge, we do not really know people.. To convert our look, we need a proper light, the light of faith, the light of Christ. That's what made the Father de la Mennais, during the celebration of religious profession, say: "*The religious profession is [...] participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, since it associates you with his divine functions of redemption, to his charity for men, and to his zeal for the glory of his Father ... Just see how great is the mystery that is going to take place in your soul. ... All the work of religious life is to perfect this divine imprint...*"¹⁶

Our outlook is changed, but also, and especially, so is our mind: in baptism and in the grace of religious profession, we can say, in faith, each of us is not only born of human parents, in a specified region of our world, with its own culture. One is much more than that! Whatever his human origin, everyone is called to be a member of the new humanity in Christ which is the Kingdom of God of which the Church is the sign.

Initial and ongoing training will be for us a way of conversion to make our own the manner of thinking of the Son of God and feel truly part "of his family". This will help us find the right position of son before the Father and our Brothers. This training will help us practice the humility and filial obedience that lead to the cross, this loving obedience to the Father for the salvation of men, our brothers. We will then learn that the perfection of man is to be like Christ, the perfect man, crucified and transfigured. We will feel called to an inner transformation which will become epiphany of God at the heart of this world.

¹⁶ S VII, 2169

Our first goal in formation is to look at Christ, contemplating him daily through the Word, receiving the gift of his life in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. When we pray the Psalms together, we have the great opportunity to say the words spoken by Jesus; he thus makes us enter his thoughts if we allow his words to become ours. Meditation on His Word in the morning prayer, the 30 minutes of meditation - time reserved for God, sacred time - should be the preferred time of our days as they make us integrate the "thoughts" of the Master.

Formation is the process of being conformed to Christ. This exceeds our own strength, we who are wounded by sin. Only He can do it. But He wants our loving adherence and obedience. This is not optional or partial. It must be unflinching. *"When God says he wants our sanctification, it is as if he said he wants to find in us the perfections of his Son; ... that we be clothed with Christ, as the Apostle says ...; that we judge all things as he did; that we love as he loved In a word, that all our thoughts be consistent with his thoughts and we be his living image!"*¹⁷. *"United to Jesus, let us seek what he seeks, let us love what he loves"* (EG 266) Pope Francis asks us. This demands of us a firm determination and not a rudderless, whimsical will.

Each charism expresses the originality of the way Christ "feels". It is a manifestation of a gift of love which leads to the total sacrifice of self in the footsteps of Jesus. It is a response to the power of love that is engraved in one's being by the Holy Spirit. It is a way to be like of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. The charism is a call to give everything, to give ourselves fully after the parable of the talents and as was asked of the rich young man: *"Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, then, come, follow me"* (Mk 10: 21). Christ not only asked him to give a glass of water. He asks us to sell everything and give everything to the poor. We are entering into another di-

¹⁷ S VIII 2469

mension. Where the charism is concerned, he asked us not to be satisfied with our works, even if they are beautiful and successful. He asks us to give ourselves totally, to forget ourselves radically. If we really enter into this way of imitating Christ, we will not be satisfied with human results, we will work energetically so that the kingdom of God comes in all of the men and women we serve. We will not seek to be applauded by the world. We will be happy because our names are written in heaven, as Jesus told his disciples who had worked wonders in his name. Compliments or recognition become meaningless. All that counts is the total gratuitousness of the gift of self. We will not count the fruits of our actions and of our work; they will be abundant, thanks to the Holy Spirit, but He alone will tally the results.

It is up to each one to take the road to conversion, for if grace is necessary to adopt the “feelings” or “attitudes” that were in Christ, our decision to be in his likeness is no less essential. Each moment of our life is part of this process of conversion. Our Rule of Life is a precious guide in this regard. However, we have to be convinced that the attitudes of Christ Jesus must be ours. The unmistakable sign that such is our ardent desire, it seems to me, is our wish to make known the One who fills our life. *“What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known?”* (EG 264) Let us repeat it: if our gaze does not rest daily upon Jesus, Christ and Lord, we will not answer the call of our vocation, we will not partake of his feelings and attitudes, and the ardent wish that the Father be known and loved will no longer shine on our faces.

“I see the beauty of your grace, I contemplate its radiance, I reflect its light; I am caught up in its ineffable splendour; I am taken outside myself as I think of myself; I see how I was and what I have become. O wonder! I am vigilant, I am full of respect for myself, of reverence and of fear, as I would be were I before you; I do not know what to do, I am seized by fear, I do not know where to sit, where to go, where

to put these members which are yours; in what deeds, in what works shall I use them, these amazing divine marvels!" (VC 20) For, by vocation, although unworthy, our life in the Church must be "one of the tangible seals which the Trinity impresses upon history, so that people can sense with longing the attraction of divine beauty." (VC 20)



IV

Fruitfulness in Christ.

Christ is at the centre of our religious life. The objective of our vows is to be in his likeness and to share his attitudes toward his Father and our brothers. In Christ, through our vows, our life becomes fruitful. Without attempting a comprehensive study of all of them – they have been addressed in the previous circular letters – let us pause on the vow of consecrated chastity. Poverty and obedience, in fact, bear fruit in a heart transformed by the love of God and the joy of doing his will, also expressed by the vow of chastity which, however, seems most in crisis today.

People all too often view sexuality in a way that does not promote human dignity.¹⁸ It is therefore important for religious to have clear ideas, together with a firm determination, in this area of our being that intimately affects our emotions and our relationships with others. As religious Brothers and as religious educators, we must try to know what God, through sexual difference, reveals to our humanity.

¹⁸ I seek inspiration in this chapter from the intervention of Michelina Tenacious before the religious Formators in Rome in 2015

From Genesis, the Word of God shows us human beings as sexually differentiated: *"God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"* (Gn 1: 27). The difference between man and woman is presented with reference to God, *"in his image."* Now we know that, *"for the Fathers of the Church, the image was a very strong reality, not just a painting, but the exact reproduction of the model and symbol of the original being."*¹⁹ This is in part a mystery of faith. Through sexual difference, something is said about God and our relationship to God, about our faith in Him, about the Alliance. In the Bible, faith, love, marriage, obedience, mercy, all these words that speak of God, tell us something about the nature of an encounter and of a relationship which are a fundamental part of our being as image of the Trinitarian God. Thus, *"The chastity of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34), is a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren."* (VC 20)

The difference between a man and a woman is a parable for all relationships. It is a matter of welcoming the other with the limitation that represents his "otherness", the other whom we can neither possess nor suppress, the other who reveals to us our own vocation to love and to openness to others. In this parable of sexual difference, two elements are essential: the body and the relationship.

At the heart of our lives, the sexual distinction of our humanity is thus a mystery that manifests communion in differences. The limits of each person are meant for communion among people. They are an opening in a loving relationship, not a relationship of possession or of domination. Faith invites us to risk an alliance which calls for

¹⁹ Bernard Sesboüe, *L'homme, merveille de Dieu, Salvator*, p. 77

loving others in their differences. Thus is overcome the poison of the original sin that seeks to possess the other and has no other outcome than self-centredness.

The vow of chastity makes us God and other-centred. All other self-centred bonds dissolve. All other “bonds” – to which Father de la Mennais paid particular attention – are vanquished through the gift of self rather than giving in to self-interest, the pursuit of personal pleasure and identification with cultural imperatives. *“To some, he has shown the way of celibacy, for the sake of God’s Kingdom,”* (Mt 19:12) which manifests more clearly and more completely the thoroughly innovative character of the covenant inaugurated by his Incarnation” (D 35b).

For us, to follow Christ in the consecrated life does not mean, of course, to despise this first vocation of two persons becoming one flesh in love. We are simply called to give the ultimate meaning to this union: the choice to give up sexual union is a decision that has an eschatological and spiritual meaning: it is the public declaration of our faith in the mystery of the Word made flesh and of our yearning to fully stake our life on Him. By consecrated celibacy, we affirm that God Himself loves us personally, and that to Him, we are an “other”, freely and definitely called to radically respond to his love. And we affirm that we have chosen to love, to love Him, to be one with Him, thanks to Him and to Him alone, and to bear much fruit at the heart of this relationship, of this alliance.

How can there be such a relationship of love between God and his creature? The difference is so great between them! The answer lies in Jesus, in the mystery of the Incarnation. In Jesus, man and God are united in the same person. So imitating Jesus, as we penetrate unto his way of thinking, as we said earlier, as we let ourselves be transformed into Him, we become united to God and we bear much fruit for eternity.

Moreover, we hold our fruitfulness from the Church, and therefore from our community since we are one Body of which Christ is the head. It must be emphasized that our communities derive their fruitfulness from their profound union with Christ. We should take time to ponder this mystery. A simple human outlook is not enough to understand why we must live as brothers. If Christ Himself does not built our "house-community", there will be no unity and no real fertility. Fraternal life is fruitful only if it is Christ-centred and if its heart beats to the rhythm of the whole Church. The Eucharist gives us full access to this mystery. We must ask ourselves what changes we can bring to our communities so that they beat to the rhythm of the Heart of Christ: the oratory or chapel, the beauty of the place, the choice of images or icons, the frequency of the celebration of the Eucharist in community, the way we talk about the realities of faith, how we judge the ministers of the Church, the priest or priests of the parish, the care taken in praying the divine office, etc.

We are called to the same obedience, poverty and chastity as Christ to the same extent that our hearts are filled with the same filial love for the Father. We know that, in Christ, everything is a reflection of the Father. His will is that of the Father, his love is that of the Father. Christ kept nothing for Himself. In giving Himself, He gives the Father. In Jesus, we too are sons. This is expressed by the vow of consecrated celibacy. Therefore, we can, by grace, bear the same fruits He does.

Without being married to someone, we are men of fruitful relationship. Without seeking physical parentage, without even identifying ourselves with the physical descendants to which we belong, to a cultural, national or family inheritance, we are all brothers. "*Who is my mother and who are my brothers?*" asks Jesus. Baptism, which incorporates us to Christ and makes us sons of God, inaugurates a new culture, a new earth, a new family. To enter freely into this culture of the life of God, we must free ourselves of the partiality of the human family, of society, of our own history. In this, the life of

Brother is more than ever prophetic. And the word of Father de la Mennais, who had a clear perception of this, resonates in our hearts: "*You are messengers of peace and of love who seem descended from heaven to teach men to know God and to love Him.*"²⁰ Those who "fashion" the heart of children are "sons of God", not related to their human family, but to the family which is the Church. This is what the "Mennaisian Family", made up of Brothers and Laypeople, means, a family willed by the Holy Spirit, in "the Church, family of God." With Saint Paul, we can assuredly say that "*we know no person according to the flesh*", but according to the Holy Spirit.

Consecrated chastity "*witnesses to a preferential love for the Lord. It reaches, transforms and imbues with a mysterious likeness to Christ man's being in its most hidden depths.*" (D 36) Our fruitfulness stems from the strong bond that unites us to Christ. It is through this specific alliance that binds us to Him, this communion to his thoughts, to his way of judging and of behaving that our life will be fully fertile at the heart of a Spirit-renewed humanity.

²⁰ To Bruté de Rémur, 1810



V

Prophets of Eternity.

The life of the Brother, forever given to God, is based on the love of Christ for his Church which never fails and which has no end. Christ is faithful. We also rely on Him to be faithful. This fidelity is a “prophesy” of God’s love for the world, of his loving Presence, of the total gift of his life for us.

We are signs, prophets of the Mercy of the Father – how can we without fear and trembling? – which has been revealed to us in Christ. We are prophets of the salvation that has come to the world in Christ. We affirm, through the gift of our life as a holy sacrifice, that the centre of gravity of time rests in the mystery of the slain and victorious Lamb who is henceforth sitting next to the Father, as mentioned at the beginning of this circular letter.

We are the prophets of the Lamb and our religious profession even now places us with the Lamb next to the Father. Was not the intuition of the two disciples, James and John, spot on as they requested to be seated with Christ next to the Father? They had perhaps forgotten that the cross stood in the way; the disciple is not

greater than the Master. Yet, they felt called to share in a mystery way beyond what the heart and the mind can understand.

This is that of which we are prophets. *“Our life is not hypnotised by the emergence, the flourishing and then the decline of our strength; it is magnetised by the victory of Christ over the second death: the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night (Ap. 12, 10). All our human commitments share in both this earthly and heavenly liturgy; the victory is assured. It is only a matter of lasting, of holding firmly to what we have, for “it is done” (Ap. 16, 17). The future can be now and eternity within reach when God overturns time, when he intervenes and creates anew... Earth has already seen the heavens... Henceforth, world events testify to the coming of God inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus: heaven has come to the earth and rejoices with it with one voice. The story is irrigated by the blood of the Lamb; it reveals, in pain, the bitter and violent refusal of the testimony of the Cross, and the call of the Spirit for the coming of the Bridegroom. In this dialogue, this cosmic liturgy, the Bride finds herself forever promised to Him who said, “I am coming soon.” Of this we are also the poor witnesses.²¹”*

Some among us have been blessed with accompanying Brothers who testified before them of this victory of the Beloved, even into the experience of illness and death. Those who have thus assisted Brothers have been evangelized like they had never been before. The message of their "passage" from earth to heaven has shown that for them it was "already done". Their heart, where Christ had the advantage over the rest, was already in heaven with Him. What more have we, and especially what more beautiful have we, to show? At that moment, capturing the whole story of their lives given to Christ in the generous yes of their youth, they understood the immense

²¹ Noëlle Hausman, in NRT 138, 2016, p. 74. Un vin nouveau pour la vie consacrée? Le cas des engagements temporaires ou à vie.

goodness of which they were the beneficiaries. And at the same time, this is the Good News that, although their hearts and hands were too weak to carry it, Christ has filled it with his radiant and loving presence.

These Brothers are for us the precious witnesses of Christ at the example of John Mary de la Mennais who wrote in his Memorial: *"The heart of a man of good forever rejoices (Prov. 15) This is true, because for him the pains are joys; he savors with delight the bitterness of life; eternity for him is already present, and losing himself in God, losing himself in the abyss of truth, of love, he enters heaven where he enjoys an ineffable peace."*²² *"Tomorrow, my brothers, tomorrow eternity!"* he often reminded his Brothers. *"Let your mind rise,"* he said to them again, *"let your heart open and expand, let your imagination enlarge to conceive, as much as our human weakness can, a more just idea of the benefits that the Lord has promised and has prepared for his elect."*²³ *"Eternity! Eternity! God alone! These three words are worth more than all the books of science, and after having repeated them deep in my heart, I feel more than ever the nothingness of all that is not God."*²⁴

It is true that today, preaching and theology talk less and less of eternal life, that is to say, of our future in the unity of God and Christ. *"We feel discomfort, as if our actual temptation was to escape reality in promises of painless certitudes... When the subject comes up, it is only a brief parenthesis to invite us to come back to earthly duties and to draw our attention to the "already-there" of salvation. How-*

²² M. 89

²³ S IV 1286

²⁴ To Bruté de Rémur

*ever, abandoning such teaching would spell the suicide of faith. Eternal life is the omega point of the Christian mystery, without which all the rest vanishes like an empty speech.*²⁵

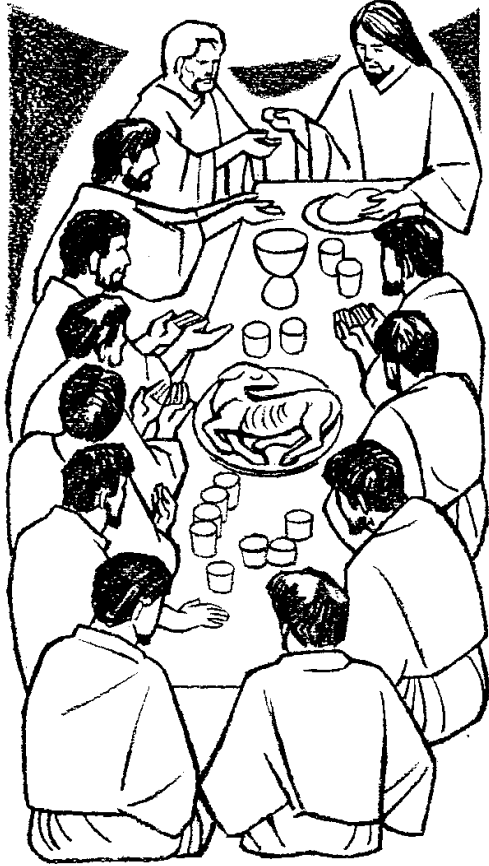
Consecrated life, whether we like it or not, finds its full meaning in this reality of faith: we are in the world without being of the world. We witness to Christ who recapitulates the whole of history. In Him, all is said. Our life, from the instant we have given it, has no meaning but in Him. On the day of our religious profession, we have entered eternity thanks to Christ, the Crucified, the Living, the Conqueror over evil and death. Our life testifies to the fact that “*Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world*” (EG 276).

At the heart of our educational mission, this is what the Brother witnesses to, to the extent that he is faithful to the total gift of his life without ever trying to go back on his word. Such is the meaning of our “being-in-the-world” as we have already said. We are sons in the only Son. This is the one and only thing that we have to tell our students at the heart of a relationship that is a revelation of this marvellous mystery. They will remember us with love and joy to the extent that we will have done everything possible to reveal to them this unique and fundamental message: Gaze upon Christ, listen to Him, and do what He tells you. You’ll see: in Him alone you will find the groundwork of your life, lovely and lasting happiness.

In the words of Father Saverio Cannistrà, “*we are more than ever invited to develop a theology and a spirituality of expectancy: ‘Come, Lord Jesus’.*” To be prophets of an eternity which is already present shows that we are expecting the One who is coming. The world will know where the source of true happiness is if it notices, through the poor witnesses that we are, the distant coming of God.

²⁵ Bernard Sesboüé, *L’homme, merveille de Dieu*, Salvador, 2015, p. 346.

Through daily fidelity to our Rule of Life, the gratuitous love of our Brothers, the generous gift of each moment to the little ones awaiting the Kingdom, we are called to show our expectation full of hope of the glorious coming of the victorious Lamb. In order to do this, let us fill our lamps with the oil of prayer and of the silent listening of the Word, so that this expectancy – which can seem long and difficult at times – does not find us asleep or “*acting like busybodies*” (2 Th 3, 11) or still blinded by the deceitful lights of “worldliness”.



VI

You Are my Friends.

Through this modest survey, we have felt that ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who is the main actor of our inner transformation in Christ. We are not more deserving than others. Like them, we are poor sinners. Often, however, we can see how many lay Christians can have a committed life, given to the point of being for us stimulants on the way to the likeness of Christ. Everyone is called to holiness, whether religious, priest or layman. Only God knows the heart of each. He knows the generosity of our response.

The question now is how, exactly, we respond to our vocation to be "friends" of Christ – so he calls us: *"I no longer call you servants ... but I have called you friends"*. (Jn 15, 15). We have seen, there is no possible response without an exclusive love for Christ. This is our call: to love Him, to love but Him, so that He loves in us. Without this bond of love, humble and entire, we will not live the "radicalism of prophecy" to which the Pope invites us.

We have to ask ourselves: Is Christ at the centre of our life, of our preoccupations, of our thoughts? Is He the object of our sole love?

What bonds of love unite us to Him? Where are we at with this intimate relationship with Him? What can we answer to the question that so much moved Peter by the lake side: “*Do you love me?*” What of our quiet contemplation of the Word of God? Is it our daily fare? Or do we allow ourselves to be “distracted” and seduced by everything that keeps us away from Him?

For a Brother, the answer to those questions is not optional. It is essential. It is a matter of the radicalism of one’s love for Christ Jesus. Our love for Him presupposes personal decisions committing our daily journeying. Otherwise, the heart darkens and saddens, our eyes, dazzled by the artificial lights of the world, no longer perceive the beauty of Christ that shines in the darkness. The ears, if accustomed to the sounds of the world, no longer hear the sweet music of the Spirit: “*We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep*” (Lk 7, 32).

Brothers, you and I have to turn toward the Goodness, the Truth and the Beauty of Christ and to ask the Father, according to the words of the letter to the Ephesians “*that He would grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith; and that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled up to all the fullness of God*” (cf. Ep 3, 16-19).

Let us reread our Rule of Life and grasp the radical answer to which we are called: “*The religious profession is the action of one whom the person of Christ has captivated, who wills to declare publicly his desire to follow him... (D 23). Through his life, the Brother is a witness... He reminds everyone that God exists, that Christ lives on, that holiness is still possible. He strives to exemplify in his life the*

spirit of the Beatitudes, so necessary for the transformation of society (D 29). Every genuine community visibly united in his name announces the Kingdom of God (D 31). Through prayer, Brothers obtain the light and strength needed 'to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society' and thus add vitality to their efforts as religious working to educate youth on whom rest so many hopes for the future" (D 78). It is up to each one to continue this revision and to make it a personal project.

Today, the Congregation needs Brothers who will take literally this Word of Jesus: *"He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing... My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples... These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full... but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you... You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another"* (Jn 15, 5, 8, 11, 15b-17)

So it is now up to everyone to take stock of his life and to judge whether it can be said that Christ is truly the center of his mission and of his vocation. I would like to suggest an approach to this exercise:

For a revision of life

- Start by giving thanks for His love for you, and after invoking the Spirit, let your memory recall the signs of his presence and of his mercy to you, throughout the years of your life, as far as you can remember. Thank Him for his call, the graces He has given you so that you can respond to Him with generosity. Tell Him you want to continue the journey with Him because He is the joy of your heart.

- Then, listen again to his voice deep in your being. The questions below may, perhaps, be a help to undertake this listening and discernment. It is up to everyone to see and to use them freely:

- When I'm immersed in action, do I have the time to turn inwardly to Christ? Upon waking, does my heart turn to the Divine Friend who watches over me and wants me entirely to Him? Or, do radio, internet or social networks invade my thoughts at dawn, leaving no chance to the inner silence to prepare myself for the encounter with the Lord in prayer? And in the evening are my last thoughts for Him? These simple things are the signs of the constant attention I bear to his presence throughout the day, like a continual prayer, the way we tirelessly love. They are manifestations of a desire to please Him in everything and to be led by the Spirit of God.
- When I am with my brothers, or with other people, or among the children and young people at school or in other educational site, do my eyes adopt the merciful gaze of Jesus who thinks only thoughts of peace? Or do I let myself be guided by resentment, bitterness, disappointment, hasty judgments which only see the outside without looking at the heart?
- Is my life based on the Word of Jesus that is the heart of our charism and thus represents the fundamental attitude that gives meaning to my life and my vocation as a Brother: *“Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. After laying His hands on them, He departed from there”* (Mt 19, 14-15).
- Does the contemplative listening to the Word of Jesus have a place in my life every day? Whoever does not know Scripture does not know Christ! A day without meditating on the Word is not a good day. It lacks clarity from on High, from

the Guide who shows the way in the darkness, from the word of the friend that warms the heart. When I am with my Brothers, every morning in the silence of meditation and listening to the Word made flesh, is my heart awake or asleep? Has it only one desire: to listen to the Beloved? Or is it invaded by worries and distractions, without attempting a peaceful and confident reaction?

- Have I planned a regular time for spiritual reading? What are the books that nourished me in recent months and which I could go back to for a slow and prayerful reading so that the living water of the Spirit that flows from the Heart of Jesus may calm my thirst? Did I take enough care to look for those books that can help me to grow in the love of God alone? If I am a community superior or a major superior, what importance do I give to this spiritual reading for my brothers - how do I help them? - And how do I look after my own formation?
- What place do I give to the Eucharist? How do I prepare myself? What are my dispositions? Do I care to "abide" with Jesus in an intimate and true heart-to-heart after Communion? Do I take great care to meet Christ in the Eucharist with my Brothers in the evening adoration at the end of the day? Is this really for me a special time to worship Him, to thank Him, to ask his forgiveness, to call for his help, to pray for my colleagues who are the first to support and to love as they are "*my neighbors*"?
- How do I take care, too, not to go to sleep at night without having forgiven those – especially my colleagues – I have hurt by my words, my judgment, my intransigence, etc.? Forgiveness is the most important attitude that inhabits the heart of Jesus. To be like Him, we must never let bitterness, condemnations or desire for revenge to settle in our mind

and in our heart. This is why the sacrament of forgiveness is so important so as not to get infected by those sins that undermine community life and our personal relationship with Christ. What place do I give this sacrament?

It is up to each one to go further by reading the Rule of life, especially the chapters about the vows, prayer life and community life. May we thus, by the grace of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, allow Christ to be truly the center of our life as Brothers. Thus we will truly be worthy of being called by Him, his friends and brothers.

Conclusion

We cannot conclude this brief presentation on the centrality of Christ in our vocation as Brothers without remembering Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother. She is for us a mother who consoles and supports, protects and stimulates.

Mary is the beloved of God whom He fills with his grace. She is the Mother of the Savior of the world. By welcoming Mary, we make room for our Brother and Savior. We are in the world in the manner of Jesus; Mary is there to suggest the conversions we need to make, the words that we need to say, the actions that we need to take. For between Mary and the Holy Spirit there is such a collusion that the safest way to live according to the Spirit is to pray and listen to Mary. Mary, who ascended into heaven with her Son, also teaches us the hope for an Eternity of love. She is the Mother of the pilgrim Church that sings the glory of God and shows His mercy. She is the love that gives itself by offering her Son.

Mary is the believer. Through the Angel, Elizabeth, Simeon, the shepherds, she welcomes the Word who makes Himself heard in the night. You see this in Luke's gospel: not everything is revealed to her all at once. So she journeys in faith. She has traveled before us the route that we are asked to take. At times, she is overtaken by events,

such as the disappearance of her twelve-year-old. She carries all this in her heart and in her mind: "*She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*" (Lk 2, 19). She hears the Word of God and she reflects on it. She wonders what all of that means. She asks questions (Lk 1). "*Luke, who best marked the privilege of Mary, is also the one who best shows the humanity of her faith.*"²⁶ "*Blessed is she who believed ...*" (Lk 1: 45). Such is the way Luke defines Mary, in the words of Elizabeth, at the conclusion of the Visitation story.

So we can turn to her with confidence. On our journey following Jesus, who better than Mary can help us discern the steps to take, the sacrifices to make the decisions to take? Who better than her can teach us to listen to Jesus in prayer? Who better than her can help us to love Christ and to imitate his love for children? Who better than her can show us how to center our lives on Him alone, to be his friends and witnesses in the world? Who better than her can make us live the vows of chastity, obedience and poverty with great joy and profound generosity to better be in the likeness of Jesus and prepare his coming into the world? Who better than her can open our heart to the hope of the coming Kingdom, that Kingdom in which she enjoys eternal happiness today?

Mary, servant of the Lord, fully docile to the Holy Spirit, totally devoted to the person and to the work of your Son, we see in you the outstanding model of the consecrated life of chastity, obedience and poverty (cf D 12).

Sustain us in our response to the Lord's call. We decided to become Brothers to go, in his name, to children and young people. Support our efforts; help us to go happily and humbly to them and bring them the peace and joy of Christ. Teach us to proclaim fearlessly the wonders that the Lord works in the world today. Teach us to be His

²⁶ *Marie dans le Nouveau Testament*, A. George, Desclée de Brouwer, p. 109

faithful witnesses to all, especially to his favorite: the poor, those who despair of life, the "lost sheep" that your heart loves so much.

Mother most pure, "ever ready in obedience, courageous in poverty and receptive in fruitful virginity" (VC 112), obtain from your divine Son to bear witness through "transfigured lives", in communion with all our Brothers and Laypeople of the Mennaisian Family, with all our religious brothers and sisters and with all the Church.

Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who, moved by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith, as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One, help us to say our own "yes" to the urgent call, as pressing as ever, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. Filled with Christ's presence, brimming over with joy, you sang of the great things done by God. Obtain for us now a new ardour to seek new paths so that the gift of unfading beauty may reach everyone. Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for us that we may never be closed upon our certitudes and that we seek in everything to imitate Christ (cf. EG 288).

Mother of Jesus and our Mother, pray for us. Amen.

Brother Yannick Houssay

18th of October 2016

Saint Luc, evangelist.

