

BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION

A TRANSFIGURED EXISTENCE



Brother Yannick HOUSSAY, superior general

December 2006 n° 300

GOD ALONE



***A TRANSFIGURED
EXISTENCE***

Brother Yannick Houssay, s.g.

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I – Introduction

The March 2006 General Chapter has invited us to remobilise ourselves so as to give a new thrust to our life as Brothers and to the mission which is the Congregation's today.

The Chapter, in fact, points the way to living at the service of young people and children according to the “*special vocation*”¹ which is our calling as Brothers. We shall not each map out our own course, but we shall walk in close communion among ourselves and with lay people, following Jesus in the spirit of our founders, particularly John Mary de la Mennais.

We shall travel as pilgrims, guided by the Lord, confident that the Holy Spirit breathes upon us and on each of our communities.

¹ Vita Consecrata, 14

We shall set out, at the invitation of the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, with our eyes fixed upon the “*icon of the transfigured Christ*”.²

Only our God, in fact, whose Love is unutterable, can give birth to life and to love in each of us and in our communities. If our heart feels for the Congregation as a whole, beyond each our own present circumstances, we can then be at one with John Mary de la Mennais who exclaimed: “*O my poor soul, when will you be baptized in the Holy Spirit?*”³ When shall we allow the Spirit to truly transform us to be, in the Church, the presence of Christ who saves children and young people?

Let us set out together, our eyes fixed on the star that guides us towards true beginnings.

The circulars which I shall be sending you will be, in a manner of speaking, like the bread and water for the road which Elijah received to stay the course at the invitation of the Lord. I will share with you my innermost convictions, without any other claim than to invite you to reflect upon our life, in prayer and brotherly dialogue, so that we may answer God’s call with all our strength and all our faith. May you allow the Spirit to speak to you and lead you into ways of peace!

This first letter, under a title borrowed from *Vita Consecrata*, n 35, is a modest reflection on what is at the very heart of consecrated life and, consequently, at the heart of each baptized person. Lay people may draw from it if they are drawn to it. However, those pages concern Brothers first and foremost. I address myself to them more directly, drawing inspiration from *Vita Consecrata*’s following passage: “*The fact that all are*

² *Vita Consecrata*, 14

³ Memorial 71

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*called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call.”*⁴ Other letters will be intended for Mennaisian lay persons.

As Brothers, we are called to follow Christ more closely and to let ourselves be transfigured in his image by the Spirit in keeping with the charism of the Congregation. It is at the heart of the “experience of God” that our existence is “transfigured” and that “fraternal communion” is achieved.

I invite you to keep your eyes on the “goal”, on Jesus whom we have decided to follow. It is in the mystery of his presence and of his love that the true and refreshing Source of Life can be found.

At the invitation of our founder, let us challenge ourselves and, if we must, let us renew our decision to imitate Christ and to follow only him. Time is short! The Kingdom of God is at hand! If we do not convert, if we do not allow the Spirit to transform us, who shall prophesy? Yes, “*Let us leave everything behind, let us go to Jesus.*”⁵

How can we remain faithful to our mission of educating and evangelising youths and children if we, like the apostles, do not decidedly follow Christ? Like them we have received the call “*to make him the focus of our life*”.⁶

We cannot evangelise and educate youths in the name of Jesus if we are not ourselves transformed by his Spirit. We cannot evangelise without being evangelised by Jesus! Only truthful loving induces true love. Humble living points to a

⁴ Vita Consecrata, 39

⁵ Memorial 71

⁶ Vita Consecrata, 15

selfless existence! Example speaks louder than words. Only then can we make disciples of Jesus of those entrusted to our care!

*“My Brothers! Your glory, understand it well, is to make Christians of these children who without you would never be; these children who can only become Christians if you teach them, not by word, but by your examples, to be humble of heart...”*⁷

The youth need Hope to look to the future with confidence, a future on which shines the Love with which God enfolds them. *“Whoever loses faith suffers arrhythmia, but faith can be recovered. Whoever loses love has a coronary: it is serious but it is not irreparable. Whoever loses hope suffers heart failure: it is fatal.”*⁸ Is this not what John Paul II was saying: *“Our world needs a lifestyle that stresses the urgency of a prophetic witness which entails the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life.”*⁹

When we hope for the goods that are given to us freely by God, our life becomes a prophecy for the world. Who, better than Jesus, can bring Hope to our world, especially to the youth? We bring this Hope if our existence is transfigured into a living image of Christ who welcomes children and gives them his Love and his Salvation.

Let us, therefore, be led by him since, in faith, he invites us to live the same “experience of God” as did Peter, James and John. These three disciples “have enjoyed this intimacy with the Master, surrounded for a moment by the splendour of the Trinitarian life and of the communion of saints, [...] as it were caught up in the horizon of eternity”. Then *“they are*

⁷ S VII 2331

⁸ Cal Danneels, in *Vies consacrées*, 2006

⁹ Starting Afresh from Christ, 8

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immediately brought back to daily reality, where they see ‘Jesus only’, in the lowliness of his human nature, and are invited to return to the valley, to share with him the toil of God's plan and to set off courageously on the way of the Cross.”¹⁰

I therefore invite you to hone your contemplative gaze on Christ, source of our “beginning” and promise of eternal life. Together we shall then be in a position to propose to the youth the true “*way of peace*” (Lk 1, 79).

As we move along we shall welcome this call to a renewed faith and we will question our response to it for today’s world. We shall discover that Christ is not primarily the one whom we strain to imitate but rather the one who makes us ever more and more into his image. We shall attempt to understand how we can let the Spirit move us in our everyday living and we shall conclude with a heightened awareness that we cannot set out on this road of watchfulness other than by “eating” the daily bread of God’s word, letting ourselves be transformed by Christ’s Body given up for us and his Blood shed for us, accompanied by Mary, our mother.

¹⁰ Vita Consecrata, 14

II – Answering a call

A – *“You have chosen me.”*

a. Our initial call

Let us cast a clear-headed and kindly look on our life and ask ourselves: Why have I become a Brother? Why and for Whom am I a Brother today? What is the meaning of my life, for myself, of course, but also for the youth and the adults to whom the Lord is sending me, and for God himself?

These questions will bring images, memories, words to mind. We shall become aware of the Lord’s comings at different moments of our life, and more specially, no doubt, at the time we decided to become Brothers.

We come to a deeper appreciation of our vocation in our day-to-day living when, in the light of faith, we realise how God has come to us and has touched us in a very personal way. To merely ask how the wish to become a Brother has entered one’s mind would trigger but a superficial response. A faith-inspired response would rather prompt us to give some thought to how the Lord intervened in the course of our existence, how we have

sensed his presence, his hand laid upon us, and how we have answered.

His coming to us has probably been most discreet, allowing our freedom the joy of awakening to his love. The soft breeze felt by Elijah in his solitude is the perfect image of such an encounter. Nevertheless, in the light of faith, we realise that the Lord has loved us, that he has come close to us and has gently drawn our heart into the warmth of his own heart. He has called us by our own name and we have sensed that our life was precious in his eyes.

On the day of our initial call, or when the Lord's invitation became more insistent, we have "*sucked and been delighted with his bountiful bosom*" (Is 66, 11). We did not then take stock of all that it meant for our life but we sensed that with God our life had reached yet unknown but decisively new proportions. Our heart opened wide its doors and blossomed.

If this initial grace does not freely come back to mind or if its power escapes us, we should not conclude that it never was or that it is of little importance. Let us rather say that its trace has faded with time. And, with a humble and loving heart, let us pray to the Lord to grant us to be overcome once again, in ways that he sees fit, with the power and the beauty of his call.

b. Rekindling the ardour of our response

Life's concerns, all that prevents us from plumbing our innermost being as much as we would wish, even the responsibilities of our mission can dim our perception of the Spirit's presence. Perhaps even doubt has cast a gloom over the brightness of his interior light. A variety of motives may have

imperceptibly replaced those that were undeniably present at one time, and attempted to blot out the past.

Nevertheless, large numbers of Brothers, whether at 30, 40 or 50 years old, could testify to having had to renew their commitment to be Brothers, be it during a retreat, in times of hardship or during a period of intense prayer. That moment outstripped our initial decision in intensity, in maturity, no doubt, since *“the testing of your faith produces endurance”* (James 1, 3). Such a moment must have been felt in one’s body and soul as a watershed which confirmed the firm and conscious choice to follow Jesus no matter what might happen! The answer then becomes an act of total self-giving: “Yes, truly, I am all yours.” All the fibres of our being are then consumed with joy and peace. The experience of our vulnerability at the heart of the call makes us share Peter’s feelings of sadness when he heard Jesus ask him for the third time: *“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”* And we answer: *“Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You”*. (Jn 21, 17)

When we wish to be the masters of our destiny, on the other hand, we shut the doors of our being to the Spirit. The sense of our vocation then fades or dies. Every form of justification is good enough, all kinds of motives are invoked to rationalize personal choices that are no longer grounded in God alone! We have become well-heeled. It has become impossible for us to enter the Kingdom through the narrow gate! Our heart has shut itself up. It cannot bear to walk *“the way of the cross”* with Jesus.

If Christ is not the be-all and end-all of our life, how can we be enticed to the extent of giving him our everything, past, present and future?

Let not the fire die out in us. All it seeks is to glow and spread. Let us recall that Jesus once came to us and whispered in our ear: “If you so wish, come, follow me. I will make of you an educator of youth. You will go to them in my Name. In my Name, you will show them how much I love them. In my Name you will go after the lost sheep whom I have saved by dying on the cross. If you so wish... Give me a free hand. Go and do what I say to you.”

Each of us has heard Jesus speak to him in this way, in his own mother tongue since he knows us by our name. What shall our answer be, today?

B – “Here I am!”

a. What do you expect from us, Lord?”

“It seems to me that being silent, listening and thinking are still expected of us. For the time being, what matters most is not what we need to do but rather to know what God expects from us. It is when ‘the word of the Lord is rare’ (1 Samuel 3, 1) that the prophets are enlisted.”¹¹

We have the unfortunate habit of pointing an accusing finger at others rather than questioning our conduct. It’s so much easier! Without admitting it, such an attitude rubs off in our dealings with the Lord. The gift of ourselves is but half-hearted, and yet we are prone to take him to task when we feel he does not look after our welfare as he promised he would. Did we choose to work for his Kingdom or for ours? Is he the object of

¹¹ Giamberto Pegoraro, Congrégation St-Joseph de Murialdo

our quest, or are we? And yet, he is faithful he who has saved us. Perhaps we fail to remember this.

We would very much want to have a clear vision of what we need today. We would very much like to know the way to thorough renewal, on the personal level as well as at the level of community-living, and even in the accomplishment of our mission. We certainly would wish to rejoice at the success of the work of our hands. However, the fruits of our labour are oftentimes not noticeable and we complain: *“The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me!”* (Cf Is 49, 14). Of course, we all know his answer: *“Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands...”* (Is 49, 15-16). And yet, no matter how hard we look, no signs seem to point to the hoped for spring.

We then ask ourselves this question: What must we do? We forget that we should rather ask what God expects from us. It is a question of a different perspective, that of fixing our eyes on Christ, of listening to him in a love-filled silence.

Only *“those who are poor in spirit”* (Mt 5, 3) can confidently embark on the journey that surely leads to the cross. Only they can find again, today, the thrust of their youth: *“Immediately they left their nets and followed Him”* (Mt 4, 20).

“What we lack is a sufficiently powerful experience of God that will sustain our life’s project enough for it to bear fruit. It is a crisis of taking root and of all-or-nothing. Without the experience of the sacred and of the absolute, without an immersion in the primeval springs of reality, religious life loses

all meaning. In other words, what we lack is the presence of the Spirit, a presence that is smothered by habits.”¹²

b. He who loves knows God.

Our religious life as Brothers will only recover its former radiance for ourselves and for those to whom we witness if it bears the hallmark of Christ’s paschal mystery. We must therefore “*put out into the deep water*” (Lk 5, 4).

Like a window wide-open unto eternity, our heart will open to the Spirit who even today whispers to us the words of Jesus: “Are you aware? I am there next to you. I am within you! Your life is precious in my eyes! I am sending you. See these children who are hungry, these young people who are all at sea. Don’t you realise how much I love them? Don’t you know that I have come to save them? If you wish, you will save them in my Name. If you believe, if you love in truth, you will heal them in my Name.”

Such a call cannot be heard in the hubbub of a heart that is burdened and clouded over with bitterness and disappointment. Love in action, unconditional openness to and respect of others, occurrences seen as meeting places for God’s love are so many avenues through which the heart can discern the signs of the Spirit. How often has this soft breeze come to our ears but our closed heart simply failed to take note?

We have to rediscover the byways of silence and of fraternal love, a silence peopled by faith and by considerate and compassionate love, a silence that keeps us alert and attentive.

¹² Father Lorenzon Prezzi, director of *Il Regno*, To major superiors.

The words that do not build up brotherhood destroy communion, lull our watchfulness to sleep and take us away from our mission. A heart that listens is a heart that loves and secures peace. Let us remember that our Rule of Life calls us to a “*preferential love*”¹³ for the Lord. It invites each of us to focus “*his life on God who calls him to walk in his presence in peace of soul, the fruit of single-hearted love*”.¹⁴

c. Share in the prayer of Jesus

The daily meditation is a choice moment for the transforming action of the Spirit who can convert us into “contemporaries of Christ”. Let us once again listen to this advice of John Mary de la Mennais: “*Never, for whatever reason, shorten your meditation, for it is, of all your exercises, the most necessary...*”¹⁵

For our founder, the “meditation” is the ideal time for a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus. He, himself, who was so involved, so committed to accomplishing the will of God in his everyday life, could not do without this silent communion, this heartfelt dialogue with the Lord. Let us therefore never dispense with the meditation. Let us ensure that intimacy with the Lord is its hallmark. Let us bring to it interior strength and poverty, let us attend to its beauty but let us also acknowledge its inevitable struggle. Let us listen to Jesus who tells us, as he did the three disciples whom he invited to contemplate him in his transfiguration but who could not persevere with him in prayer

¹³ *Rule of Life*, Directory 36

¹⁴ *Rule of Life*, Directory 79

¹⁵ Rule of 1823

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at the time of his agony: “*Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Mk 14, 37-38).

Why is waiting for the Lord always so difficult? Can we not commune to the prayer of Jesus, go with him to Gethsemane and keep him company just like the friend who attends to his friend in adversity? Can we not show the necessary “*good will*” that will allow him to open our heart to the breadth of his own heart, that heart which so cherishes children and young people?

May these 30 minutes of profound communion with Jesus, listening to his heart, be most intense. Let us stay with him and whisper: “*Not my will but your will be done!*” (Mk 14, 36). Let us make our abode in a Love that set the world afire, Hope of salvation, Peace to men of goodwill.

Thus, when the Lord calls each of us today, in a whole new way, Jesus himself will answer: “Here I am, Father, to do your will. My whole life I give to you for the salvation of children and of young people, and for your glory. In union with my Brothers, here is my life. All is yours.”

III – A transfigured existence

We have been called. We have replied in the affirmative. We have decided to follow Christ. We have embarked on that road since a few years or for quite some time already.

What have we done with the treasure that the Lord has entrusted to our care? Have we buried it or have we made it bear fruit? Or even more basically, what has become of our life? Is it totally Christ's? Is he really at the heart of our existence or have we not gradually built our whole life without him? When all is said and done, we are like the rich young man anxiously calling on the Lord: "What must I do to become a different person and to decide at long last to follow you?"

We all know what Jesus tells us: "*One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*" (Lk 18, 22). We have already done that. But then, have we not taken back what we had given up? Have we not surrounded ourselves, once again, with the goods that we had decided to give up?

Can we make ours this word of our founder? "*Peace be with you, men of goodwill! You shall belong to God in the here and now and he will give back to you a hundredfold all that you have given up for him. Peace be with you for eternity, in holy Zion, where you will be surrounded by all of the children whom*

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you will have guided and whose voices will join the angels' in heaven singing this beautiful canticle: Eternal peace, joy to men of goodwill: 'Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis'" (cf. Luke 2, 14).¹⁶

A – Enticed by Christ

a. The hand of the Lord is upon me

“Starting afresh from Christ means proclaiming that consecrated life is a special following of Christ, ‘a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren’. This implies a particular communion of love for Christ [...] It is ‘a special grace of intimacy[...] it is a life ‘taken up by Christ’, touched by the hand of Christ, a life where his voice is heard, a life sustained by his grace.”¹⁷

What better way to describe the transfigured life in Christ which is ours? It is “*a special grace of intimacy*”, “*a communion of love for Christ*”, a life “*touched by the hand of Christ*”. This is not the outcome of an action that is external to ourselves and independent of our own will. It is an action that transforms us, like the clay that is being moulded by the potter, but which requires our free, voluntary and loving assent: “*Behold, I come!*” (Ps 40, 8).

¹⁶ S VII, 2376

¹⁷ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 22

b. We are transformed in this image (2 Cor 3, 18)

Six days after having told the crowd and his disciples: “*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*” (Mk 8, 34), Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves, Mark tells us. “*And He was transfigured before them...*” (Mk 9, 2).

It is instructive, in the light of the word of God, to delve further into the mystery of that choice. The word μεταμορφουσθαι (metamorphoustai) occurs four times in the New Testament. It appears twice in the synoptic Gospels with reference to the transfiguration of Jesus: in the passage from the Gospel of Mark quoted above and in the corresponding passage in Mathew. Paul uses it twice (2 Cor 3, 18 and Rom 12, 2) to speak of the transformation of Christians.

In anticipation of the last days when “*the Lord Jesus Christ will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory*” (Ph 3, 21), this metamorphosis of Christians is marvellously presented by Paul: “*We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (metamorphoumeta) into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*” (2 Cor 3, 18).

This transformation operates an in-depth renewal and makes us sons of the Father. The Spirit, through baptism, is the main agent of such a transformation, in the Church. The whole person is transformed into a new creature. However, our concurrence to that grace must continuously be reiterated. To

stand still is to retreat into the old world: a dramatic about-face.¹⁸

Thus must we understand that we are enticed by Christ. Every Christian is invited to make his that mystery, but more so the religious for they have been chosen to witness for all to see in the here and now what eternal life shall be. We are called to “*reflect as in a mirror the glory of God*”.

c. Letting Christ decide

Called as we are to imitate Christ, to be transfigured in his image by the Spirit, we recognize the image of the transfigured Jesus in the crucified Christ. We are thus introduced at the heart of the mystery that makes its home in our very being, body and soul, heart and mind.

As a result, we shall not in the first place be looking for human means which are all too often illusive and misleading. We shall ask the Spirit of the Lord for the knowledge and the love of what is proper to do to become what we are by the grace of God.

Even at that, Christ living in us must be given a free hand. For instance, there are ways of thinking about the future which do not make allowance for total trust in God’s Providence and which do not allow the final decision to God alone in matters that concern our life. The best way to “prepare” tomorrow’s Brother is to live our vocation today as we seek to reproduce the image of Christ among children and young

¹⁸ *Le discernement dans les écrits de Saint Paul*, Gérard Therrien, Gabalda, p. 142

people. Let us leave tomorrow into God's hands. To do otherwise would be running the risk of dreaming up an enticing but deceptive future. The Lord is the Master. We answer his call today. Tomorrow will bring with it all the necessary lights to discern his will at the appointed time. The future of each Brother and that of the Congregation are in his hands. There is no need to worry.

Let us decide to do nothing without him and he will do nothing without us. Christ is with us wherever we are, whether with young people, in the classroom, in a session of catechesis, in educational and pastoral care activities or engaging in individual counselling. Let this be our conviction: we are the presence of Christ and he who sends us leads the way. Therein lies the secret of true joy for us who have made Christ the exclusive love of our life.

When age, sickness or simply obedience seems to take us away from an educational presence to the youth, we must then make them closest to our heart. When we think that we cannot anymore contribute anything of ourselves to this wonderful mission, the Lord provides means of quenching the heart's thirst for giving witness. We all know Brothers who have witnessed to God's love until their health failed completely. Using as examples figures from the Bible, notably Nicodemus, John Paul II underscored the following: "*Nicodemus too, a highly-regarded member of the Sanhedrin, was an elderly man. He visited Jesus by night in order not to be seen [...] Nicodemus appears again at the burial of Jesus, when, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, he overcomes his fear and shows himself a disciple of the Crucified Lord* (cf. Jn 19:38-40). *How reassuring are all these examples! They remind us that at every stage of life*

the Lord can ask each of us to contribute what talents we have. The service of the Gospel has nothing to do with age!”¹⁹

d. Reading the signs of the times

Indeed, we cannot every single moment be aware of the grace of Christ living in us. Intimate moments of prayer are personal encounters with the Lord which, in the light of faith, teach us that without him we are nothing. At such times, we realise that it is he who moves our hearts, takes our hand and heals our wounds.

Contemplating this action of God at the heart of our life can be done through the daily rereading of our life by means of “*Lectio vitae*”. Sometimes we hear God tell us: “*Do you not yet understand?*” (Mt 16, 9). At other times, on the other hand, we shall be like the Apostles around Jesus telling him of the healings we have carried out in his name, and we shall hear these words: “*Rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven*” (Lk 10, 20).

A thankful rereading of our life refines our outlook on our Brothers, on lay persons, on young people, on the Church and on the world. We will then banish empty judgments from our speech and we will beam forth the peace that the Lord has promised to his disciples united in his name. “*The more you are completely God’s, the happier you must be and the happier you will be; he will shed on you his sweetest and richest blessings.*”²⁰

To walk in Christ’s footsteps is to decide to do the work which he does, which he inspires and which he accomplishes in

¹⁹ *Letter to the elderly*, John Paul II, 1999

²⁰ John Mary de la Mennais to Brother Cyprian, December 7, 1846

the world. Not in his place but in his name! It is having a heart that beats and feels and loves like his.

e. Cherishing our vocation

To contemplate Jesus, to fix our eyes lovingly on him on the cross, to recognise him in the eyes of the young people and the adults whom we mix with, specially life's casualties, and to work with him to bring them release in his name, such is a Brother's vocation today. This is the call that he has received. Is there anything more admirable?

Is not having doubts about one's vocation the same as having doubts about Jesus himself? See Peter walking on the water. Had he not doubted Jesus and his saving power, would he have been afraid?

To know our vocation, to love it, to give an unconditional answer, without ever looking back implies putting our hand in the hand of God and allowing him to transform us into his image. Ours is not to judge of the end-product. God will attend to that.

This constant handing over of our life into the hands of God cannot but call upon us blessings of light and of strength at the appointed time. Jesus himself is guarantor of wonderful things to come: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father"* (Jn 14, 12).

And again: *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (Jn 15, 8).

B – Some pitfalls to avoid

a. Preferring our own will to God’s will

It is relatively easy to say that we wish to follow Christ and that we allow him to transform us, but is this our firm commitment? When we say that we wish to do the will of God, do we seek his advice? These questions are vital to our spiritual growth.

If Christ is not at the heart of our decisions, how can we understand our vows and truly and joyfully live them? Take the case, for instance, of the Brother who receives an obedience which does not appeal to him. If he looks to his own advantage without any reference to God, the quality of his obedience will be strained or he will seek a reversal of the decision. He is not looking for God’s will through the transfer that is proposed. He has his own little ways and he is comfortable with them. He cannot see why he should be asked to relocate. Such an attitude gives rise to dissatisfaction, bitterness and thinly disguised criticism against authority.

Life consists of a multitude of concrete situations which test the fundamental choices of our life. This is when we can ascertain whether we are truly seeking the will of God or whether our heart is divided, concerned as we still are with our own glory, our own ideas or our own peace of mind. Without passing judgment on our Brothers – who can claim that his commitment is absolute? – we realise how we shut ourselves to the grace of the Spirit thereby shutting ourselves to true joy and inner freedom. How could it be otherwise since we have chosen a state of life whose sole foundation is Jesus, and Jesus crucified?

The temptation to decide without Christ is constant. We can easily fall into the trap of taking our wishes to be God's. Our generosity knows no bounds for what pleases us, but our commitment is only half-hearted if a decision does not suit us. If the will of God always seems to be easy, it may be befitting to ask ourselves, all things considered, whether we are not actually doing our own will.

The mere wish to do good by ourselves, disregarding our confreres, represents a serious risk for religious communities of apostolic life. Who can claim that he is completely safe? We are all too easily convinced, at times, that we have a monopoly on truth even if we are the only ones – or just about – to think so!

Let us always look for the comfortable security which community-based religious obedience provides. Let us also give much importance to the written community project within which all of our choices find a home. Let superiors organize, in accordance with established provincial practices, community sharing and discernment meetings so that the community can agree on its way of living in conformity with the Rule of Life. This seems a good way in this day and age of living within a community that seeks to do the will of God in joy, dialogue and assurance.

All should be concerned with discerning the signs of the Spirit, with doing “not our will but the will of the Lord” and thus imitate Christ who was obedient unto death, and death on the cross.

Father de la Mennais reminds us that to do so, “*we need sensible people who are not guided by their whims, but by the*

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*rules of faith [...] They do not mind whether you place them here or elsewhere [...] God alone is their motto”.*²¹

*“Be humble, docile, patient and peace will be yours, God will bless you.”*²²

*“Walk with simplicity the road of obedience: proceed from day to day without too much forethought, without wishing anything but God’s will.”*²³

Father de la Mennais finds an echo in the words of Father Deshayes to the Brothers of Saint Gabriel who are at his bedside at the time of his death: *“My Brothers, in everything that I have done, I have never sought anything but the greatest glory of God.”*²⁴

The advice of our founders invites us to simplicity, humility, right intention as sure means to be, after Christ, praise to the glory of God.

b. A too abstract concept of the sequela Christi

The one whom we follow is not a creation of our imagination or a purely intellectual construct. He is not only the man Jesus whose features we have to reproduce through dint of effort. He is Christ, the beloved Son of the Father, who died and was risen for us, alive today in his Church through the Holy Spirit.

²¹ S VII 2297

²² John Mary de la Mennais to Brother Gérard, 23 July 1842

²³ John Mary de la Mennais to Brother Étienne-Marie, 12 February 1843

²⁴ Gabriel Deshayes, *L’Audace de la Foi*, Écrits et Paroles, p. 383

Jesus has called disciples to follow him. He has conversed with people around him whom he enticed after him, who listened to his teachings and went from surprise to surprise. By his examples, his words and his deeds, Jesus moved hearts and shaped them. Some of them were disappointed and left him on the way. However, on Pentecost day, everything was settled. The light and the power that came upon them set their hearts ablaze and their tongues afire.

Afraid as they had been, they became fearless. They communicated to us what they had seen and what they had heard. Their love for Jesus was so great that they gave up their life for him.

It is certainly important to set ourselves performance standards and life goals. It is necessary, for instance, to be better acquainted with the main features of our Mennaisian charism in order to follow Christ in the spirit of our founder. But all of this must be viewed by Brothers whose hearts are focused on Christ and who are disposed to be transformed by him.

Brothers M.-A. Merino and J. Olabarrieta are very clear on this question in the introduction of “Mennaisian Spirituality”. This spirituality, they write, “*can only be lived in union with him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life*”, and they add: “*We do not so much have to act for him as to let him act in us. It is not so much a matter of our undertaking things as of corresponding to the longing that he places in us and of consenting to his action in us.*”²⁵ As they open for us the doors of the icons, they introduce us to the contemplation of Christ such as John Mary de la Mennais presented him to his Brothers in accordance with the gifts granted to him by the Spirit. Thus, our hearts become more pliable in the hands of God. Thus, as we make ourselves

²⁵ Bros. M.-A. Merino and J.F. Olabarrieta, *Mennaisian Spirituality*, p. 8

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compliant in the hands of God, we become disciples of Jesus in the spirit of John Mary de la Mennais.

This spirituality does not consist in a following of Christ according to a “*disembodied spiritualism which negates the incarnation and history*”, neither is it an imitation of Christ securing “*with extra meticulous rigidity the means by which it expresses itself*”.²⁶ It is the Spirit, counting on the consent of our freedom and love, who transfigures us in his image.

Each Brother, happy in his vocation, confident of belonging to the Mennaisian family which he loves, must walk the road with Jesus while discerning the signs of his presence and his repeated calls, nurturing his apostolic choices and discerning their authenticity in prayer and community sharing. He relies on the help of his Brothers and in the first place on his superiors. He listens to the founders. He listens to the Church which John Mary de la Mennais loved so much. Then and only then will Christ live in him.

To follow Jesus is an itinerary fashioned in the intimacy of a personal relationship with him, made up of refusals, of new starts, of overcast days and of bright days.

*“To be a Christian is not copying Christ in his historical dimension, from the outside, for each person is unique as is his mission. Rather it is allowing the Spirit to act in us so that the sentiments that were in Christ Jesus take flesh in our own existence [...] We become someone whose life clearly reveals traces of intimacy with Christ.”*²⁷

On that question, let us give Father de la Mennais the last word: In order to follow Christ, “*we should maintain a complete*

²⁶ Dictionnaire de la vie spirituelle, art. *Suivre le Christ*, D. Mongillo.

²⁷ Guido Stinissen, Carme, in *Le Christ votre vie*, Cerf, p. 47

dependence on the Spirit of God and never grieve him. We should be attentive to discern what he wants of us, consult him frequently, and when unsure about what we should do, pray with renewed ardour that he be the light of our heart.”²⁸

Let us remain faithful to this humble heart-to-heart prayer with Jesus promoted by the grace of the Spirit. It will bear fruit in the form of creative love for our Brothers, in happy availability to the will God and in radiant living, the source of which young people and adults will observe.

Is this not what the world needs “*that expects to see in consecrated men and women the concrete reflection of Jesus’ way of acting, of his love for every person*”?²⁹

²⁸ John Mary de la Mennais, Memorial 15

²⁹ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 2

IV – Growing in the Spirit

The Rule of Life is for us a sure guide that can bring about in us a perfect docility to the Spirit. Let us therefore constantly refer to it.

When committing ourselves to the religious life, we have declared publicly “*submitting ourselves fully to the Rule of Life*”. The same text of our profession says that the purpose of our decision is “*the imitation of Christ in his way of life by the practice of the evangelical counsels and in his mission by the Christian education of youth*”.³⁰ We committed ourselves for all to see.

The whole of our life calls for continuous growth and, while it implies successes and failures, we can always count on the grace of God. He alone in final analysis can grant to us this unutterable blessing of radiating in our being the traits of his only and beloved Son.

He is the unifying principle of our being. He teaches us the necessary patience to wait for his coming. He enlightens our mind and our heart so that we become “sensible men”.

³⁰ Renewal of the vows, *Rule of Life*, p. 195

A – A unified life

“The Brother’s apostolic life offers a striking witness to the transcendence of God and to the restoration of mankind in the risen Christ.”³¹

The unity of our life, so much sought after, can only be accomplished in our total acquiescence to God. A Brother is an apostle by his whole life and all of his life is consecrated, offered to the Father through Jesus. Besides, this is the very meaning of the Eucharist. Communion to the Body of Christ transmutes our life into an offering; otherwise, our worship is meaningless. Participation in the Eucharist unifies our life. Staying away from the Eucharist is to become estranged from the very essence of our religious consecration.

It is the Spirit who operates this perfect offering at the core of our being. If we think that we lack this grace of unity, if we have the impression of being torn apart between so many preoccupations and apostolic activities, is it not because our faith, upon which should rest the whole of our endeavour, has died out? If our everyday action does not lead us to Christ, is it not because there is no room for him in our life ? It is not because we would rather manage our life without him?

It is not above all a matter of achieving a balance between prayer and action, but most of all a question of adjusting our whole being to the one goal, Christ, so that we may *“know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that [we] may be filled up to all the fullness of God”* (Ep 3, 19).

³¹ *Rule of Life*, Directory 109

Of course, the place we give to prayer in our life is an unmistakable sign. Benedict XVI's words to the priests of the diocese of Albano in September 2006 are very pertinent: "*The first necessity for priests is to leave the majority of things to the Lord. This is not a time taken away from your pastoral responsibilities; it is pastoral work to pray, to pray also for others... The first necessity for all of us is to recognize our limitations with humility and that we must leave the majority of things to the Lord.*"

What is true for priests is equally true for religious. A Brother who prays is a Brother who evangelises. His prayer does not drive him into a life of quietude. Rather, if it is genuine, it leads him to take upon himself his share of the mission work for which labourers are so few. Prayer thrusts him in the midst of youth to witness to the fire that consumes him.

And if he cannot be with the youth, his prayer evangelises through the mystery of the communion of saints referred to above. Indeed, how could our apostolate bear fruit without the prayer and the joyful gift of our elderly and sick Brothers' life?

Praying and evangelising go hand in hand for they are both love in action. An action which does not lead me to prayer does not evangelise for it does not bind God and the one I serve in the same love. The unifying principle of our life, as in the case of Jesus, is Love. To love God and neighbour is one and the same commandment. In the context of the Christian education of youth which is a form of charity, we can make our own the words of Benedict XVI on love: "*Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ.*"³²

³² Benedict XVI, *God Is Love*, 34

Every Brother, no matter his age or his circumstances, who prays in truth with his Brothers and in the silence of his heart, will feel within himself the need to evangelise. It may be difficult in some countries to talk openly about Jesus. Nevertheless, nothing can stop a Brother from ardently wishing to talk about the one whom his heart loves. Putting the lamp under the bushel would result in the waning of his love. He must pray the Spirit to do what he cannot do or does not know how to do.

B – The patience of the grower

“The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows – how, he himself does not know.” (Mk 4, 26-27) This teaching is echoed in the Letter of James: *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it”* (Ja 5, 7).

It is when time runs short that we must learn patience! If we rush, we run the risk of taking our wishes for God’s will and to work for motives which are not always God-inspired.

Father de la Mennais appealed with all his heart to his Brothers to display apostolic zeal: *“Not that kind of tepid and lethargic zeal which is so common today, but an ardent zeal that never tires.”* But he also warned: *“Zeal is all too often mistaken for a kind of jealousy against the good which we do not do and for exclusive love for the good that we do.”*³³ As a result, wrong

³³ S VIII, 2402

choices are made, discernment is warped, harmony festers and we fall prey to sterile activism.

A true disciple of Jesus ardently wishes to do what He wishes. He gives his life to do his will in everything. He has renounced himself. He does not seek personal success. God is everything for him. God alone! He does not grow impatient if the fruits are not forthcoming.

The patient man knows that what he has sown silently grows. He remains serene. His eyes are fixed on Christ, not on himself, on his limitations, on his failures. In fact, it is hazardous to overvalue the results of our actions, even those actions which we do for the Lord.

What the Lord expects of us today is to show a burning zeal for the Kingdom, similar to that of the grower who can wait for harvest time. After all, we are but humble servants.

Let us therefore “*bless the sovereign will of God who [...] permits that our efforts at doing good be frustrated [...] so that we may be convinced [...] that power and glory belong to Him alone*”.³⁴

Is this not our very motto: God Alone! It invites us both to ardent zeal and to peaceful abandon in faith and love. In a most appropriate way, the Rule of Life associates our motto to the four attitudes that define the spirit of the Congregation: faith, charity, abnegation and humility! Let this be our way of life! Let us do all we can while waiting with confidence and fervour for the earth to produce its fruit.

³⁴ S VIII, 2415

C – The intelligence of “wise men”

“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Ep 5, 14).

Here, Paul broaches the issue of discerning the will of God. He invites to vigilance. Christ will shine on us if we learn to discern the calls of the Spirit. To that end, one must avoid being misled by anyone who lacks the lights of the Spirit or by deceitful imaginings which our own mind can construct: *“Let no one deceive you with empty words” (Ep 5, 6).*

A bit further Paul adds: *“So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ep 5, 17).* It is to be unwise not to discern the signs of the Spirit. Paul concludes: *“Always and for everything let your thanks to God the Father be presented in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ep 5, 20).*

According to Paul, we have the choice between associating ourselves to *“the unfruitful deeds of darkness” (Ep 5, 11)* or to be *“wise men”* who *“always give thanks for all things”*.

Indeed, it is in giving thanks with songs and praise to God *“for all things”* that the mind is enlightened and opens itself to the judgment of the Spirit. Only then will we take the right decisions and will our life bear the long-awaited fruits.

John Mary de la Mennais also gives much importance to discernment. Speaking on the quest for perfection, he underscores how few understand its real meaning. *“My fervour must increase, that is, I must be more faithful to imitate Christ and to follow the inspirations of his grace.”*³⁵

³⁵ S VIII, 2485

However, he notes that we often have a mistaken idea of that perfection: *“We get carried away, our heart dries out, we wear ourselves out in endless subtleties, we go astray in labyrinths which lead nowhere.”*³⁶

What rule must we follow to avoid being *“unwise”* according to the exhortation of Saint Paul? John Mary de la Mennais replies: *“Our judgments must rest not on reasonings but on facts.”*³⁷

Instead of relying on *“vain reasons”* according to Paul’s expression, we should be listening for *“facts”*, that is, we should be discerning the signs of the presence and of the action of God. Our mind should keep us alert to interpret the footsteps of God in our lives instead of developing useless and sterile considerations. Here again, Saint Paul points to the safest way: *“Rejoice in the Lord always [...] Be anxious for nothing [...] and the peace of God [...] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 4, 4-7).

In final analysis, our ability to follow the inspirations of the grace of Christ *“consists in being humble, small, pliable in the hand of God; in being full of indulgence and of charity for our Brothers, valuing ourselves the last and least perfect of all; [...] in doing with love, simplicity and admirable peace everything which is in the order of obedience. [...] Ah! You are upset about many questions, about many things! [...] Open up, make wider your soul that God may pour in it torrents of grace, light and peace.”*³⁸

³⁶ S VIII, 2486

³⁷ S VIII, 2487

³⁸ S VIII, 2488-2490

V – A grace received in the Church

A – *The Word of God*

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Is 55, 10-11).

The Word that goes forth from the mouth of the Father is Jesus, the Word of God, who has come to us. He accomplishes what he says, whether he is forgiving sins or healing a paralytic. His word is productive. He does not return to the Father without having accomplished his will.

It is by contemplating Jesus, the Word incarnate that, transformed by the Spirit, we become sons of the Father, images of the beloved Son. *“Thus, there is no other object of contemplation for Christian prayer than the holy humanity of Christ.”*³⁹

³⁹ *Petit traité de théologie spirituelle*, Michel Rondet, s.j., Bayard, 2005, p. 50

We therefore must “eat” the Word in the same way we eat the eucharistic bread. This is not the place to elaborate on how we can best perform this reading in faith, this *Lectio divina*. Some Brothers are already engaging in this practice on a regular basis. We can no doubt consecrate more time as well as more commitment to it so that our reading of the Word helps us fathom the mystery, opens us up to contemplation and transforms us.

a. Listening in the Spirit

We receive the Word and, acceding to a deeper understanding, we open our mind and our heart to the teachings of the Lord.

Such a reading of the Word is not purely and simply a study of the latest exegetic investigations. These have their importance and time should be spent to uncover the inspired writer’s meaning. What we look for then, in union with the community of believers, is an opening up to a spiritual understanding of the Word, with lively faith and humble alertness, “*in the same sacred spirit in which it was written*”.⁴⁰

Such a reading welcomes what has been announced by the Apostles and transmitted by the Church: “*And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 Jn 1, 2-3).

⁴⁰ *Dei Verbum*, 12

Faith opens up the heart to a spiritual listening without which the spiritual senses of our being remain closed to the Word who offers himself to our touch, sight and hearing.

b. A listening that transfigures

Reading and meditation prepare and gradually give way to a personal encounter with Jesus.

Our mind seeks to free itself from thinking which, in the long run, ends up taking so much space that we cannot, in faith, really hear the voice of the Beloved.

Teresa of Avila fought against a too “spiritualist” notion of prayer. She was convinced that we have to go by way of Christ, the Word made flesh, to reach the Father. But she also detected the pitfalls of a spirituality that was caught up in the snares of abstract thinking. For her, the mind, forever on the alert, must place itself at the service of the personal encounter with Christ who needs but few words to teach the heart that listens.

“Let us not forever strain at achieving only that (meditating on scenes from the Gospel); let us rather remain next to Him, stilling our reasoning powers and directing them, if possible, at contemplating He who watches over us, keeping Him company, speaking with Him, quietening reasoning. Let us keep watch with He who watches over us, keeping Him company, speaking with Him, appealing to Him, humbling ourselves before Him.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Thérèse d’Avila, *Autobiographie*, 13,22

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Let us heed this advice. It does not imply that we should do without listening attentively to the Word, on the contrary. This quiet and active listening will generate such fruits as peace and charity only if our heart engages in a personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus. All *Lectio divina* should lead to such transforming intimacy.

B – The Eucharist

After the miracle of the multiplication of the bread, Jesus said to the multitude: *“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life”* (Jn 6, 27). And the Jews asked him: *“What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”* (Jn 6, 28). Jesus specifies: *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent”* (Jn 6, 29).

There follows a dialogue on the nature of the bread of life. Jesus concludes: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven”* (Jn 6, 32). When asked, *“Lord, always give us this bread,”* Jesus replies: *“I am the bread of life”* (Jn 6, 35). *“The bread also which I will give is My flesh for the life of the world”* (Jn 6, 51).

Decidedly, *“this is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”* (Jn 6, 60), as several disciples ask themselves. But Jesus replies: *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”* (Jn 6, 63).

This is the Word on which our faith relies to enter into the contemplation of the mystery of the Eucharist. Our eyes do not see! Our mind is obscured! But the Spirit enlightens the eyes

and the mind of the heart so that we may recognise the wonderful work of our salvation.

The food that Jesus gives us is his Body given up for us and his Blood shed for us. The Eucharist makes sense today only because Jesus has given up his life on the cross. The Bread and the Wine are shared among us as Christ's presence for the life of the world.

When we share this food, we share the Love that saves us and we are intimately associated to Christ's mission of salvation. Our religious consecration takes on its full meaning. In him, we die for those whom we serve; we offer our life for the salvation of the world.

Thus, we realize that *“to be a Christian is, in reality, nothing other than participation in the mystery of the Incarnation. When we eat this unique bread, we become what we eat.”*⁴²

What must we do then when we celebrate the Eucharist daily with the community of believers?

*“Look at ourselves in Him as in a mirror[...], allow ourselves to be gradually educated by the Son's openness to the will of the Father through the action of the Spirit.”*⁴³

Offer all those whom Love wishes to touch and heal, starting with the children and the youth whose educators we are.

Offer our life for them. Be, in him, body given up and blood shed, in love.

When the eucharistic celebration is in the morning, groom our heart for our apostolic endeavour “in the footsteps of

⁴² *Faire route avec Dieu* Joseph Ratzinger, Parole et Silence, p.69

⁴³ Brother Jose Antonio Obeso, Circular 298 (Permanent Formation)

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Jesus”, and when in the evening, offer our daily work so that he may make it bear fruits of salvation.

After a day serving our Brothers and the youth, worship him in his Body offered to our gaze. Renew the experience of the disciples before the transfigured Christ: “*Lord, it is good for us to be here*” (Mt 17, 4).

C – Mary

Mary has allowed the Word of the Father to come into her and make her fruitful according to his will. She allowed herself to be transformed to the extent of becoming like the one to whom she gave birth by the power of the Spirit. She is the fruit of the Word. “*This splendid correspondence to the word is the work of the Spirit.*”⁴⁴

Mary gave her full consent to the plan of God, to the Incarnation of the Word, to the Redemption. The whole of her being is a “yes” to God. There is no resistance in her. Hers is an unconditional offering!

“*The consent which was so strenuously worked out over the centuries has become in her mouth marvellously transparent and devoid of hesitation.*”⁴⁵

Mary reminds us, Brothers, that we are called to a transfigured existence by the Word. In her, we contemplate the image of the only Son of whom she is the most definite expression. She is so close to Jesus that she knows the intentions

⁴⁴ *La Parole et le Corps*, Régine de Charlat, Centurion, 1993, 88

⁴⁵ *Eléments de doctrine chrétienne*, François Varillon, Tome I, p. 186

of his heart. In his name, she tells us as she did the servants at Cana: “*Whatever He says to you, do it*” (Jn 2, 5).

From her is readily available whatever efficacious help we need for the road. Keeping our eyes fixed on Mary, praying often to her, loving her like children their mother – this is a way of grace that leads with full assurance to God alone. What more wonderful gift to offer the youth and lay people than to introduce them to Mary and to show them the graces that they can obtain from her!

*“May her name never leave our lips, may it never depart from our heart, and in order to benefit from her prayers, imitate her life [...] Keep her in your thoughts, you will not be lost [...] If she inspires, you will never tire,”*⁴⁶ writes Saint Bernard.

To our eyes, Mary is the most beautiful, the loftiest realization of the “imitation of Jesus Christ”. Her Assumption is the benchmark of her accomplishment in God, of a life that is fully adjusted to the Word incarnate whose mother she is and by whom she is saved. She is, body and soul, the very likeness of Jesus.

The vocation of our baptism, to which we are called in a very special way through our vocation as Brothers, and the message that we are sent to proclaim to children and young people, Mary herself has accomplished them fully in her own person.

To contemplate her is to fix our eyes on the Author of our salvation with faith-filled hope that we too shall be transformed into the glory of the only Son.

⁴⁶ St Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 2, n° 17, ed. J. Leclercq, 1966, p. 34-35

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“The Blessed Virgin's exemplary holiness encourages the faithful to raise their eyes to Mary... For it is impossible to honour her who is ‘full of grace’ (Lk. 1:28) without thereby honouring in oneself [...] friendship with God, communion with Him and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is this divine grace which takes possession of the whole man and conforms him to the image of the Son of God [...] Mary, the New Woman, stands at the side of Christ, the New Man, within whose mystery the mystery of man alone finds true light.”⁴⁷

Let us then love praying to Mary through the simple means of the rosary, prayer of the humble, prayer of children.

Let us give ourselves to her so that she may take our life and offer it to Jesus.

In so doing, we shall be imitating Father de la Mennais who had such a great devotion to Mary, convinced that he was of the truth of Father de Clorivière's words: *“Without Mary, one has but imperfectly the spirit and the sentiments of Jesus Christ.”*⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Paul VI, *Apostolic exhortation Marialis cultus*, March 1974, n° 257

⁴⁸ *Spiritualité d'un homme d'action*, Brother Philippe Friot, p. 229

VI – Conclusion

At the conclusion of this letter, it is fitting to reread the passage from *Vita Consecrata* it focused on:

*“Called to contemplate and bear witness to the transfigured face of Christ, consecrated men and women are also called to a “transfigured” existence [...] It is not by chance that there have been so many consecrated persons down the centuries who have left behind eloquent testimonies of holiness and have undertaken particularly generous and demanding works of evangelization and service [...] Holy men and women have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances.”*⁴⁹

It only remains for me to invite each Brother and the whole Congregation to set out on the road to contemplating the transfigured face of the Lord, a face that is mirrored in children and discovered in the neediest among them.

The road of contemplation opens onto a profound and rewarding conversion. It is through the contemplation of Jesus

⁴⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, 35

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that we are fashioned into his likeness. All action is unproductive if it is not nurtured and decided in a silent and prayerful listening to the Spirit, and discerned with the community, in obedience.

Brothers, let us tirelessly contemplate the light of the beloved Son of the Father. We shall then grow in love and in holiness. We shall discover new “working sites” which the Lord invites us to open so that children may be educated and evangelised. We shall not be afraid to take the “generous and demanding” decisions inspired by the Spirit.

And, we may be sure, young people will meet us half way. For the same Lord who calls us to conversion and to whose call we respond with ardour, will invite them to respond to our call so that they may be saved.

“Leave everything, go to Jesus.”

Brother Yannick Houssay
December 8, 2006
On the feast of the Immaculate Conception
of the Virgin Mary.