

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD....
MINISTERIAL RELIGIOUS LIFE IN 2009
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I. Introduction

The Leadership Council invited me to speak about “vowed Religious Life” following an earlier and complementary presentation on the subject of Associates. In a sense, this is a bit like talking about “wet water” because the terms “vowed” and “Religious Life” are mutually implicating though not co-extensive. As all water is wet but not all wet things are water, so all Religious Life is vowed life but not all vowed life is Religious Life. Furthermore, there are many forms of vowed Religious Life such as monastic, mendicant, or apostolic and much that applies to one does not apply to another.

So, to focus our discussion, I am going to circumscribe the topic in the hope of better contributing to our community project of meaningful discussion about our identity and relationships. My precise focus, therefore, will be on Religious Life, in 2009, of women who have made (or are preparing to make) perpetual public profession of the vows of consecrated celibacy, poverty, and obedience in the IHM Congregation, and who live out its charism, as articulated in the 1982-1988 Constitutions, in community and ministry.¹ So, our topic is vowed Religious Life in the IHM Congregation in 2009.

In what follows I have two objectives which will be given different amounts of space and emphasis but which will also intertwine throughout. First, I do want to supply a certain amount of data that might be useful in our ongoing discussions and which will already be well known to some people but perhaps less familiar to others. A colleague of mine once pointed out, as he reached for a dictionary, how much discussion time would be saved if people agreed not

¹These Constitutions were approved by the Vatican on Nov. 10, 1989, and certain changes in governance structure approved by the Chapter of 1993-94 were approved by the Vatican on Dec. 13, 1993.

to argue about facts, but to look them up. So, I've tried to do some of the "looking up" for us and to include the results in this presentation. However, my second and more important objective is to interpret the data in a way that will illuminate our current experience and supply resources and energy for what lies ahead. I will do that interpretation as responsibly as I can within the limits of my own areas of competence but this is where you have to be the judge of what seems to flow legitimately from the data and to match your own experience. Any interpretation is only as good as it is persuasive.

Two further points will affect these remarks. I am focusing this talk on IHM experience but very little of this experience is absolutely unique to us. Our current process of development is fairly common to many if not most Congregations of women Religious in the so-called "developed world"² and much of my reflection is influenced by that common experience. Finally, we are working under tight time constraints this afternoon and Religious Life is one of those phenomena in which everything implies everything else. There is not time to make all the interconnections, much less explore them, so this presentation is necessarily selective. Please keep track of what needs to be brought up in later discussion.

II. Continuity: IHM as a Religious Congregation:

Underlying all of what I will be discussing is a basic thesis, namely, that we were approved as and are officially a Religious Congregation of Simple Vows or an Apostolic

²It is difficult to find an accurate term for this reality. "First world" is outdated now that there is not really a second world and some of the third world countries of the Cold War era are no longer such. "Rich" vs. poor or "developed" vs. developing are both value terms derived from western/northern hemisphere experience and leave open the question of what constitutes wealth or development. Even speaking of "western" or "northern" is not useful because it is inaccurate. In general, the countries in which post-conciliar Religious Life has developed in the way characteristic of U.S. ministerial Congregations would include Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the UK, Ireland, some parts of western Europe, some parts of Latin America, some Congregations in the Philippines, as well as Asian, African, Latin American provinces of international Congregations with headquarters in North America, NZ, Australia, the UK, and Ireland.

Religious Congregation³, but that we (and many Congregations like us) are in the process of becoming, or already have become, a new form of Religious Life that has emerged since Vatican Council II. I say that because our life is in *SUBSTANTIAL CONTINUITY* with the current understanding of Religious Life in the Church. We are a Religious Congregation. But, as we will discuss in the next major section, our life also involves some very *significant discontinuities* with earlier understandings of enough of the constitutive dimensions of that life that it is really a new form in relation to traditional apostolic Congregations. In order to talk about the substantial continuity and the differences we need to know where Religious Life as such is situated, canonically, and how it is officially understood. (Here we are in the realm of facts that can be looked up!)

A. Situating Religious Life Canonically

The first unified *Code of Canon Law* was published in 1917⁴ and the first full-scale revision, the one under which Catholics live today, was published in 1983.⁵ In the 1983 Code there are seven Books, only one of which is crucial for this discussion. Book I contains General Norms of Canon Law. Book II, entitled “The People of God,” is divided into 3 Parts. Part 1 on The Christian Faithful and Part 2 on The Hierarchy, taken together, discuss the Church in terms of its two classes, non-ordained and ordained, with all their distinctions, grades, overlaps, rights, duties, and so on. Part 3 of Book II, “Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life” is what concerns us. Books III-VII are not our concern right now.

Book II, Part 3 has two Sections: Section 1 on “Institutes of Consecrated Life” and Section 2 on “Societies of Apostolic Life.” We are not concerned with the second section which

³This new form of non-enclosed Religious Life was approved by Pope Leo XIII in the Constitution “*Conditae a Christo*,” published on Dec. 8, 1900.

⁴This code is available as *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* in English Translation, curated by Edward N. Peters (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2001).

⁵This Code is included in *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, commissioned by The Canon Law Society of America, edited by John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2000).

governs communities, like the Daughters of Charity or the Sulpicians, whose members do not make Religious vows.⁶ We are concerned with Book II, Part 3, Section 1: “Institutes of Consecrated Life.” This Section has 3 subsections or “Titles”: 1. On norms common to all forms of consecrated life (so these would apply to us); 2. On Religious Institutes (that is us); 3. On Secular Institutes (that is not us).

There are actually five categories of consecrated life discussed in this Book II, Part 3. The “Common Norms” subsection briefly describes three forms of consecrated life that are neither Religious Institutes nor Secular Institutes, namely, hermits, the order of virgins, and a catch-all category called “new forms of consecrated life.” The forms of hermits and virgins, which originated in the first four centuries of the Church’s history, were restored by Vatican II. The new forms category is a place to locate some of the numerous experimental communities that have arisen in recent years and which do not fit into any of the other four categories (i.e., hermits, virgins, Religious Institutes, Secular Institutes) and/or are not yet mature enough to be properly categorized. When I use the term “new form of Religious Life” for groups like ours, I am not talking about a “new form of consecrated life.” We are not an experimental community in the process of working out who or what we are or might become. We are a Religious Congregation which has been in existence for 164 years. And apostolic Religious Life, the canonical category to which we belong, has had official canonical recognition since 1900 and existed for centuries before that. The term “new form of Religious Life” would have been used, for example, of the mendicants when they became recognizably distinct from the monastics. Both forms were forms of Religious Life; the mendicants were simply, as a form, younger or newer. We are probably becoming, or have already become, a new form in this sense, i.e., a new form of Religious Life.

⁶Other Societies of Apostolic Life are groups like the Oratorians, Sulpicians, Vincentians, Maryknoll men.

As we go on to talk about our identity as a new form of Religious Life it will be helpful to remember that there is much overlapping among these canonical categories, forms, and types of life which arose as people lived, throughout the 2000-plus years of Christianity, different types of heightened Christian commitment and the Church tried to describe and legislate for them, always after the fact. But these forms of life did not drop down out of heaven as pure Platonic essences. They are not neat legal boxes whose contents are absolutely different from the contents of the other boxes. So, our concern is not to distinguish our form of life absolutely from others but to understand as deeply as possible our own form .

B. Situating Religious Life Ecclesiastically

By creating a particular category for Institutes of Consecrated Life , canon law recognized what Vatican II had already affirmed, namely, that Religious Life is not part of the hierarchical structure of the Church. We are *not a class in between ordained and lay* but a state of life or lifeform that belongs to the Church's life and holiness.⁷ Furthermore, Religious Life, as a charism or gift of the Spirit, has a prophetic identity and role in the Church. That role is not an office or official task assigned to us by the hierarchy and governed by them. This is important, especially in regard to ministry. Although we are public persons in the Church in virtue of our public profession and the approval of our Constitutions, we are not, as Religious, agents of the institutional Church. That is part of the job description of the ordained.

Religious Life as a charismatic lifeform rather than an office in the Church is an *organic entity*. It is not a system of offices and functions which are successively filled and exercised by various individuals. Organic entities change, as totalities, and from within, in interaction with influences in their environment. If they do not change, they die. However, as they change,

⁷The Code picks this up from *Lumen Gentium* VI, 43. All conciliar and post-conciliar documents mentioned in this paper are available in *Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, edited by Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

sometimes very significantly, their identity remains intact . For example, in the middle ages a new form which eventually came to be called mendicant Religious Life (e.g., Franciscans and Dominicans) emerged from its predecessor form (i.e., monasticism) in response to perceived needs, both spiritual and apostolic, in the medieval Church. Traveling about, i.e., mobility, was essential to meeting those new needs. Now, stability, not traveling about, was so fundamental to monasticism that monastics made (and still do) a vow of stability, i.e., not to move about but to remain for life in the monastery of profession. Mobility for monastics is a vice. So mendicant mobility was a striking departure from the then current understanding of Religious Life. For mendicants mobility was not only not a vice; it was central to their self-understanding as participants in the apostolic life of the itinerant Jesus.

However, stability as a value of Religious Life did not simply vanish from, nor was it repudiated by, the mendicant form. Rather, stability had to become an interior reality which rooted and centered mendicants in their life of evangelical mobility. Furthermore, mobile mendicant Religious Life did not render stable monasticism obsolete. Rather, the Mendicants became a new form of Religious Life. This is how Religious Life has developed organically throughout its almost 2000 year history. New environmental conditions, especially new needs in the Church and the world, call forth new interiorly generated responses and new forms of the life emerge. Such development can be unsettling and challenging while it is going on, but it is not an anomaly, an aberration, a decline, an instance of defiance or rebellion, even when it is sometimes quite radical and revolutionary and not immediately appreciated or approved by Church officials.

Let me now restate, in more technical terms, the claim made a few moments ago that the new form of Religious Life we are becoming is in *substantial and juridical continuity* with the traditional and current ecclesiastical understanding of Religious Life which we have been living since our founding in 1845. Substantively, our members are *totally consecrated to God* in a *stable form of community life* through *public perpetual profession* of the evangelical counsels

(consecrated celibacy, poverty, obedience), and give *public witness* to Christ through our life and ministry. Juridically, our members become, through public profession received in the name of the Church, part of a recognized *Religious Institute* by which our *personal status in the Church* is changed from lay (i.e., secular) to Religious.⁸ Individually and corporately we are what the Church currently understands as Religious.

III. Discontinuity: IHM as a New Form of Religious Life

That being said, however, we are living some of these constitutive features of Religious life in very new ways, that is, there is *significant discontinuity* between the traditional understanding of some of these constitutive dimensions and the way we currently understand them, express them in our Constitutions, and live them in practice. When the Code was revised in 1983 its framers were already aware that there was a good deal of pluralism among Religious Institutes in regard to most of these features of the life that had formerly been understood in rather uniform ways. So, while affirming these features as integral to Religious Life the Law repeatedly indicates that the understanding and practice of these matters is and should be regulated by the “proper law” and customs of the Institute. For example, the requirement in Canon Law of wearing a habit as an expression of consecration and to witness to poverty⁹ derived from the historical understanding about habits which was still fairly common in the early 1980s. But by saying that the habit should be “according to the norm of proper law” the Code, (perhaps not intentionally) left the way open for something very different from what “wearing the prescribed habit” traditionally meant. We, for example, have a gold ring worn on the fourth finger of the left hand which traditionally is understood as a sign of union with Christ through

⁸See Canons 573, 575, 607.

⁹See Canon 669 and the commentary on it by Rosemary Smith, SC, including notes.

profession, and, less traditionally, a pin/pendant with the congregational logo. But some other orders have a distinctive color, or a historical emblem.

A. The End of Religious Life as Total Institution

Diversification in such matters as habit, horarium, and living conditions actually dismantled, in Congregations like ours, what sociologists have called “the total institution,”¹⁰ that is, a social configuration in which every aspect of living is governed by detailed prescriptions so that the institution and its denizens are virtually completely unassimilable to their environment. The total institution constitutes a self-contained “world unto itself.” Prisons are classic examples of total institutions. All prisoners are physically in the prison at all times unless out with permission and supervision, are identified primarily by number, dress identically and are therefore always visible to the officials, eat, sleep, work, recreate, only with and like other inmates within a rigorously controlled schedule and set of procedures. Inmates have very little or no unmonitored relationship with people inside or outside the system. The total institution can only “work” if it is total. Once you introduce choices about coming and going, lifestyle, dress, behavior, activities, and relationships, or allow any kind of real privacy or individuality, the total institution loses its totality.

The sociologists who described the total institution included the military and monasteries or convents in the category. However, they recognized a significant difference between convents and prisons, namely, that the Religious were in their total institution voluntarily. But the sociologists missed the most significant difference, namely, that, unlike the totality of the prison system which is aimed at control, the voluntarily adopted totality in the convent was spiritually symbolic of the total dedication of the Religious to Christ. No element of her life, no matter how

¹⁰The classic treatment of this subject is Erving Goffman, “The Characteristics of Total Institutions,” *A Sociological Reader on Complex Organizations*, edited by Amitia Etzioni and Edward Lehman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 319-339.

minor, was outside the scope of this self-gift. As she clothed herself from head to toe in symbolic garb, followed minute-by-minute the horarium which was the expression of God's will for her, sanctified every detail of life by obedience and exactitude in relation to the Rule, she was giving herself totally to the One she loved totally. The totality of the lifeform expressed the totality of the self-dedication.

Once perceived needs began to call Religious into a variety of ministries which demanded adaptations of aspects of their heretofore uniform life the total institution quickly ceased to be. There is no such thing as a partial totality. To many people, including some Religious and certainly some ecclesiastical authorities, this looked like the end of Religious Life itself. If the lifeform was not sociologically a total institution how could it be the expression of a total consecration to Christ? But, asked Religious, how could we talk about total self-gift to Christ if we ignored his call to us through his members in need in order to protect our institutional lifestyle? We know what choice we, with many other apostolic Congregations, made. We took the chance our foundress and founder did when they ventured out of their well-ordered life in established Religious Congregations in response to the needs of "the most abandoned souls" in the Michigan wilderness. In the wake of the Council, and very quickly in ecclesiastical time, we emerged from our habits and horaria, our convents and schools into the inner city, under-served parishes, ecumenical retreat centers; we became advocates for women and children and for our endangered earth; we undertook political organizing, relief work, immigration mediation, peace work, prison chaplaincies, hospice work, social justice projects, cross cultural ministries among the poor, substance abuse rehabilitation, poverty law, theological research and education, mission effectiveness for institutions, the arts and public speaking, and so on. But as we did so, the total institution ceased to be.

In hindsight, we can see that what disappeared was a sociological configuration which, previously, had expressed quite effectively the unity and totality of our consecrated lives by

means of external uniformity. The Religious herself now had to become a “whole,” what Jungian analyst Esther Harding called “the virgin,” the person who is one-in-herself, not controlled by external circumstances or heteronomous expectations, but who acts from within her own truth.¹¹ Like the mendicants who interiorized monastic stability even as they became externally mobile, we have surrendered external uniformity but not interior integrity. Even before we were able to put words on this experience we knew that we were being called through *doing* to deeper *being*, that the cries of our sisters and brothers and of our threatened planet and its endangered species, were the voice of Christ saying to us as he did to Catherine of Siena hidden in her contemplative cell, “Go out and do for your neighbor what you long to do for me.”

B. The Resulting Changes in Constitutive Dimensions of Religious Life

The disestablishment of the total institution was both the cause and the effect of very significant developments in our understanding and practice of the constitutive dimensions of Religious Life, especially the vows, community life, ministry, and public witness. I will just mention some of these changes, without discussing them here in detail, to remind us how significant these developments have been, individually and in combination, for our understanding and living of Religious Life. Herein lies the discontinuity of our ministerial form of Religious Life in relation to the apostolic form from which we are emerging.

1. Vows

To start with the vows, that is, the evangelical counsels which are at the very heart of Religious Life, the vow of celibacy was traditionally understood to forbid any unnecessary, and especially any purely social, contact with men; to prescribe as little contact as possible with any “seculars,” even family members; and to discourage any “particular friendships” with even our

¹¹M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries Ancient and Modern: A Psychological Interpretation of the Feminine Principle as portrayed in Myth, Story, and Dreams*, new and revised ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 125. I cite the pertinent passage in *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*, Religious Life in a New Millennium, vol. 1 (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2000), 20.

sisters in Religion. Poverty was equated in practice with obtaining permissions for every item used and the greatest possible degree of uniformity of material provisions. Obedience was the prompt and unquestioning response to Rule, customs, horarium, and superiors. Today we have only to look at our social calendar to see how our relational lives have changed, at our budget, check book, or credit card statement to see how our handling of material goods has changed, and at our agenda of commitments to see how we discern and respond to God's will in our lives.

2. Community life

Community life in the total institution was virtually equated with what was called "common life." It required all members to live under the same roof with other members of their own Congregation, under an appointed superior, eating, praying, working, recreating together, ideally and usually at the same time, in the same place, in the same way. Today, community life has much more to do with fidelity to and quality of personal involvement in Congregational life and interpersonal relationship with other members. Furthermore, and recognizing that this fact has been a source of considerable tension for us, community today includes many relationships well beyond Congregational boundaries, with Associates and other people who are related in various ways to the Congregation as part of the extended IHM family, with Religious of other Congregations, with laity as well as people of other denominations and religions or none. The community life among the members of the Congregation, which has or should have priority in the lives of the members, is the affective basis, in other words, for a much wider understanding of community than was imaginable in times past. Common life clearly has more to do with the commitment by vow of every member to total self-dispossession of material goods which are held in common to meet the needs of all and the resulting bond of unity among the members, than with uniformity of lifestyle or in the use of material goods.

_____ 3. Ministry

All ministry in pre-renewal Religious Life was exercised in institutional apostolates which were the activity of the total institution. The works were assigned to the Congregation, not to individual Religious, by the hierarchy who remained ultimately in control of them. Apostolic deployment was done by the superior with little or no consultation with the Sister and was primarily concerned with how to meet pre-existing institutional needs with available personnel. Today, ministries -- both those that already exist and are in need of ministers and those which need to be created to meet new demands -- are discerned by individual members with congregational leadership in terms of the relationship between perceived needs, in and beyond the Congregation, and the personal gifts and calling of the individual Religious. The corporateness of the Congregations' ministry was once the automatic result of all members working together in congregational institutions. Today it must arise from the conscious and committed participation of every member in the Congregation's mission according to its charism. To achieve such a felt sense of ministerial corporateness, of shared identity and action, among members whose individual ministries are extremely diverse and not usually carried out in congregational institutions is a major challenge facing Congregations like ours.

_____ 4. Public witness

Public witness, or at least instant identity and recognition, was once achieved by a completely enclosed and even secret convent life, a highly distinctive (if not somewhat extra-terrestrial!) habit, the collective apostolate into and out of which Religious moved as a quasi-military unit, and avoidance of participation in any kind of public event not specifically managed for the Sisters without in any way assimilating them. In other words, the total institutionalization of the members at least announced, and one would hope witnessed to, the totality of their dedication, individually and corporately. The witness of Religious today is not necessarily less public but there is far less publicity. It is less a matter of physically "standing out" from their surroundings by the sheer non-normality of their appearance and/or behavior and more a matter

of where they are found, to whom they minister, what they do, and how they do it. Often it is after the fact that people inquire about the identity or motivation of someone whose commitment has impressed them, and learn that the person is a “Catholic nun.” For most people, Catholic or not, that makes sense. But this also is an area of challenge for contemporary Religious. To what do we want to bear public witness in a pluralistic society which is rightly allergic to ascribed status and privilege and that has every reason to be extremely suspicious of ostentatious religion? And if oddity for its own sake is not our definition of witness, how do we understand it? What is the relationship between publicity and attracting people to Religious Life? And this does not exhaust the list of questions we might raise in this area.

It is probably only when we look at all these changes, and others we have not mentioned, together that we realize how, collectively, they have altered our life as a whole. While it is still one of total vowed ecclesial consecration to Christ recognized and served in his members it is a very new form of the life in comparison to that which most of us entered prior to the Council.

IV. THE SOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF “THE MINISTERIAL TURN”

Having affirmed the continuity of our identity and life as a Religious Congregation with the Church’s current understanding of Religious Life, and also seen how significantly discontinuous our current understanding and practice of that life are in relation to traditional apostolic Religious Life, we are now in a position to raise the more interesting and important questions: what has brought about this development and how do we interpret, evaluate, and appropriate it?

The profound transformation in apostolic Religious Life in less than four decades is due to the same historical-cultural-ecclesial dynamics that precipitated Vatican Council II itself in the 1960’s. Although some people are tempted to think that Vatican II is an historical event long past and that there are more important matters on which to concentrate today, Vatican II is like

the fourth and fifth century Councils of Nicea (325) and Calcedon (451) which affirmed the humanity and divinity of Jesus and thereby made Christianity not merely a religious sect founded by one ethical genius among others but a world religion at whose heart was the universalist claim that God became human that all humans might become divine. Out of this faith, which has been reexamined, reexpressed, and reevaluated in virtually every stage of the Church's history but which continues to mediate between the Christ-event and the life of the Church, flows virtually everything that the Church believes and attempts to live. At Vatican II the Church affirmed its radical relation to the world and everything that has followed and will develop in the future will either continue to embody this commitment to carry the Gospel into the history of humankind or will progressively render the Gospel the private fixation of a large but irrelevant cult. The most radical and revolutionary achievement of the Council was its repositioning of the Church in relation to the world which came to expression in its culminating document, *Gaudium et Spes*, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."¹² We do not have time or space here to trace the gathering of forces which exploded like a tsunami coming ashore in this first ever document of an ecumenical council to address not just the Catholic Church but the whole world. But I will sketch just enough of the story to contextualize the question which is the heart of the matter for us at this point in our history, namely, to what are we being called in response to this development? What does it mean to be non-cloistered women Religious after Vatican II?

The Middle Ages were the Golden Age of the Church's involvement with the secular order. For a thousand years, from the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century until the Renaissance in the 15th, the Church was the most powerful intellectual, political, social, and religious force in the western world. This period was followed by four centuries (the 16th

¹²See note 7 for reference on Council documents. For a good introduction to and analysis of the Council itself, see John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

through the 19th) during which the Church became increasingly reactive and defensive. All the great movements of modernity, the Renaissance (which was frightening enough), the Protestant Reformation (which traumatized the Church), the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, the democratic revolutions in France and America, the intellectual developments in evolutionary biology, depth psychology, cultural and philosophical anthropology, and physics were viewed as challenges to the Church's divinely-revealed faith and attacks on its claims to divinely sanctioned authority. Simply put, the Church was repudiating and retreating from the world which God so loved as to give the only Son (see Jn. 3:16), and to which Jesus had commissioned it when he said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn. 20:21). "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15).

By 1870, when the First Vatican Council was suspended as Europe was engulfed in war, the Church had been reduced, temporally, to a tiny principality land-locked by a powerful European state, and the Pope, Pius IX, had become a self-declared "prisoner in the Vatican." At the same time, however, Vatican I had expanded and absolutized the Pope's spiritual power in a way that strained the credibility of moderns inside and outside the Church.¹³ It reaffirmed the Pope's personal primacy over every individual Catholic everywhere in the world and declared him personally infallible. Meanwhile, the rest of the world was moving in the opposite direction. Absolute monarchies all over the west were being replaced by constitutional government and science was subverting any claims to transcendent knowledge in relation to earthly realities that was not based on reason and established by scientific method.

"The perfect storm" was brewing, creating an ever-widening gulf between the Church and the world which, by the early 1900's, had become a chasm of alienation, mutual misunderstanding, and animosity.

¹³For an extensive treatment of Vatican Council I and its ecclesiology up to the eve of Vatican II, see Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), pp. 91-149.

In Europe this chasm would eventually produce a pervasive “secularism” which would render the Church increasingly irrelevant. In the United States it was expressed in the construction of a quasi-ghetto which was intended to protect Catholics, from birth in a Catholic hospital to burial in a Catholic cemetery, from persecution and contagion but which also isolated them from full participation in society. Public school kids, false worship with Protestant heretics, contaminating contacts with faithless Jews and pagans, mixed marriages, forbidden books and movies, and much else that was part of modern American culture was to be sedulously avoided by good Catholics. We were recruited early for the Army of Youth flying the standard of truth and inducted into the ranks of a Church militant at war with the rest of world. We bought pagan babies and said the family rosary to convert the rest of the world to the truth possessed only by the Catholic Church outside of which there was no salvation. But by the 1950s, not coincidentally the high point of the influx of young women into Religious Life, it was becoming increasingly clear that the Church was not winning its war against the modern world, even in the hearts of many of the faithful who were as modern as they were Catholic.

But one man who saw the headlights of modernity coming down the ecclesiastical track was Pope John XXIII who stepped onto the world stage as the alienation of the Church from the modern world threatened to become a pastoral disaster. He realized that the solution, if there was to be one, had to match the scope and depth of the crisis. Not quite a hundred years after Pius IX had slammed the Church’s door on modernity, John XXIII threw open the windows of the Church on the modern world by calling the second Vatican Council. He knew that if the Gospel was to be preached effectively to people in the real world the proclaimer had to speak the same language, both literally and metaphorically, as the addressees, not some exotic ancient dialect no matter how beautiful. And he knew that more people would be attracted to the Gospel by the honey of humble solidarity than by the vinegar of arrogant condemnation.

Perfectae Caritatis, the document “On the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life,” drew its doctrinal foundations from chapter six of *Lumen Gentium*, “The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *Perfectae Caritatis* concerned itself primarily with the process and objectives of adaptation of Religious Life to modern times in fidelity to the teachings of the New Testament and the founding charisms of Congregations. It was published in the last months of the Council in 1965 and was followed by numerous implementing documents.¹⁴

Women Religious, at least in the first world, had been primed for the conciliar call to renewal from the 1950s when Pius XII challenged Major Superiors of women to take more seriously the potential contribution of Sisters to the Church’s apostolate and the Sister Formation Movement began to promote the spiritual, personal, and professional integration of Sisters in view of more effective ministry. Belgian cardinal Leon Suenens published his prophetic book, *The Nun in the World*,¹⁵ in 1962, urging women Religious not to restrict their apostolic efforts to children and the ill and dying but to bring their formidable and much needed gifts to bear in the political, economic, social, and professional transformation of society.¹⁶

Perhaps because of this pre-conciliar preparation most Religious Congregations of women, especially in the developed world, did not read *Perfectae Caritatis* in isolation, as a kind of self-sufficient *magna carta* for renewal. They read it through the lenses of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. The former’s bold affirmation of the universal vocation to holiness of all the baptized called into question the elitist understanding of Religious as a superior caste in the

¹⁴A very good treatment of the document, its history, the controversies involved in its formulation, and its implementation, is now available in the Paulist Press Series, *Rediscovering Vatican II*, edited by Christopher M. Bellitto. Maryanne Confoy, *Religious Life and Priesthood: Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2008), 175-271.

¹⁵Leon Joseph Suenens, *The Nun in the World: New Dimensions in the Modern Apostolate* (London: Burns & Oates, 1962).

¹⁶The amazing and often agonizing story of this period of renewal is vividly brought to life in the wonderful memoir of one of the most important and influential leaders of women Religious in the United States and internationally. See Margaret R. Brennan, IHM, *What Was There for Me Once: A Memoir* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009).

Church which was integral to the self-understanding of many Religious. The latter repudiated the world-rejecting self-understanding of the Church which was also deeply ingrained in the identity of Religious.¹⁷ Its famous preface, which is cited almost verbatim in our current IHM Constitutions as the basis for our new ministerial orientation to justice and systemic change, to diversification of our ministries, and to a commitment to solidarity in ministry with all who share this focus, inside and outside the Church,¹⁸ begins: “The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, ...are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ....Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts....That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.”¹⁹ The Church was making a 180 degree turn from isolation and rejection of the world to being in, with, and for the world. This profound conversion would touch every aspect of the life of the Church but perhaps none more directly and intimately than that form of life in the Church which virtually defined itself by separation from the world, namely, Religious Life.

Women Religious were, historically, the “favorite daughters of the Church.” Not surprisingly, of all Catholics, we were the most anti-world element in a militantly world-rejecting Tridentine Church. Religious had largely built and run the Catholic institutional system that helped isolate Catholics from the modern world. If the Church had regarded everything outside itself as a threat to faith, Religious regarded everything outside the convent,

¹⁷ It is well to be aware that this document remains controversial and is resisted by many in the hierarchy as well as in the pews. The restorationism of the John Paul II papacy which is being underwritten and extended by that of Benedict XV testifies eloquently to the fact that the document did not erase the bunker mentality it sought to counter. The distinctly “second world” approach of the Vatican to women Religious today, especially those in “first world” countries like the United States, seems to be rooted in the militantly anti-world theology that served Catholics under Communist domination well. It seems much less well suited to pluralistic societies in which the developments being discussed in this paper are evident.

¹⁸ *Constitutions of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, chapter 2, articles 10-11.

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

including our own families and other Catholics, as worldly and dangerous. We even celebrated the sacraments in private whenever possible.

Furthermore, world-rejection was deeply entrenched in our spirituality from well before the Tridentine period. Our roots were deep in desert and cenobitic monasticism as a tradition of flight from the world, death to the world, separation from the world. “Leaving the world” was a quasi-synonym for entering Religious Life. Although the process of critical reevaluation of this history had begun among Religious even before the Council, the so-called period of experimentation and adaptation in the 1960s and 70s brought Religious face to face with the question of how we were to re-conceive our identity in terms of the Church’s turn to the world. What did it mean for us to be in, with, and for the world while maintaining our identity as Religious? What would such a foundational re-positioning of ourselves mean theologically, spiritually, ministerially, psychologically, communally? As we have tried to live our way into a response we have experienced both internal conflict among ourselves, and external conflict with some Religious who read the Council’s project differently, some of the hierarchy who experience renewed Religious life as a multi-pronged threat to a patriarchal and clerical institution, and some laity who nostalgically long for the “good Sisters” to act as an anchor in a roiling ecclesiastical and cultural sea.²⁰ So, it is highly important for us to do what we are doing in this Congregational process: to reflect on where we are and how we got here, how our ongoing experience relates to our faith and tradition on the one hand and to the challenges we face in our

²⁰There were many missteps and mistakes made in the period of renewal. And large numbers of women Religious left the life, probably in most cases for perfectly valid reasons. The changes through which Religious were precipitated in an extraordinarily brief period of time were unprecedented in scope, depth, and breadth. Many publics had a vested interest in the non-evolution of Religious Life, especially among women, when women throughout the world were developing rapidly under the influence of liberation movements in general and feminism in particular. It is somewhat amazing that Religious Life has survived and that women Religious themselves who have stayed in the life and are reshaping it for a postmodern era have not only survived but flourished. However, it would be untrue to the history to tell this story as if it were devoid of major and traumatic upheavals, reversals, and struggles. I am here recounting the forward movement which is important for our purpose, namely, understanding who we have become and are becoming today.

Church and world on the other, and what it means to be non-enclosed vowed Religious in a world which is not just modern but increasingly post-modern.

V. DEVELOPING A NEW THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD AND A SPIRITUALITY OF ENGAGEMENT

Even describing, much less interpreting, our current situation is well beyond the scope of one lecture so I am going to organize these limited reflections under two reciprocal headings: the development of a *new theology of world* and the development of a *new spirituality of world engagement*. These, I would suggest, are the defining coordinates of the new form of Religious Life we are developing and the new self-understanding we must develop in order to live that life into the future with coherence, conviction, and commitment. It is, as we have seen, a form of Religious Life that is both substantively continuous and in many ways discontinuous with pre-conciliar apostolic Religious Life.

A. A New Theology of World

The Council was not simply a wake-up call to a Church whose signature product needed more user-friendly packaging. *Gaudium et Spes* and the other world-oriented documents of the Council were not just a public relations gambit to improve denominational market share in a religiously pluralistic situation. The conciliar turn to the world was a deep conversion, a seismic movement which not only collapsed decrepit structures and cleared the ground for new constructions, threw together people who had thought they did not need each other until the walls of their respective enclaves began to crumble, and challenged the whole Christian world to replace separatist institutionalism with Gospel-based commitment to the flourishing of all creation, especially the human family. The Holy Spirit had “pounced upon” the Church in a new Pentecost and raised up prophets who called for a recommitment of the Church to its mission to preach the Gospel to every creature (see Mk. 16:15), to be for all people the presence and action

of God who so loved the world as to give the only Son that all might have eternal life (see Jn. 3:16). For Religious, to belong totally to that God, which is what Religious commitment is all about, meant to love this world as God loves it, to be in, with, and for the world with our whole beings.

I think for us IHMs²¹ this change of self-understanding is well captured by a comparison of the first articles of our 1920 Rule which expressed our identity as an apostolic Congregation with the current 1982-88 version that expresses our identity as ministerial Religious today.²² The 1920 text says that the end of Congregation is “to secure the sanctification of each of its members and to extend Catholic education” (art. 1) and then it specifies that the “primary end of the Congregation is to advance the sanctification of its members by seclusion from the world and the practice of religious observances” (art. 4) and the “secondary end of the Congregation is the education of youth” (art. 6). The corresponding articles in the current Constitutions read, “The love of Jesus Christ unites us in community and impels us to proclaim the good news of salvation” and goes on to express the implications of this, namely, that “we share in Christ’s own redeeming mission in the reality of our times through a variety of ministries” (arts. 1 and 2).

We note the transition from primary and secondary *ends* (i.e., goals to be achieved) to a single *mission* (i.e., a dynamic into which we are inserted); from *seclusion* from the world to *mission* to the world; from a kind of timeless and *essentialist (and basically negative) understanding of the world* from which we are secluded, to a focus on *our times*; from a *single institutional apostolate* of Catholic education of youth to an unspecified *variety of ministries*.

²¹Other Congregations could undoubtedly do similar comparisons between their pre-conciliar and post-conciliar documents and find parallel developments.

²²See Mary Jo Maher, *The Rule: A History of the Constitutions* (printed 2004, document contained in IHM Archives in Monroe, MI). My thanks to Donna Westley, archivist, for this material.

If this were a longer presentation it would be interesting to show how this striking development passed through the 1966 revision which is clearly an interim formulation still rooted in the 1920 rule but beginning to show the influence of the Council and the renewal which would eventually find voice in the 1982-88 formulation.

And of course, as the quotation from Luke 4, “The Spirit of God is upon me...God has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, etc.”, which serves as the frontispiece of our current Rule indicates, we now explicitly understand our life in community and ministry as a participation in Christ’s mission in and through his incarnation. This comparison is, in no sense, meant to denigrate our previous self-understanding which reflected well the Church’s understanding of itself and of apostolic Religious Life in the pre-conciliar context of the early 20th century. But the comparison emphasizes that the change in our self-understanding as Religious and as ministers since the Council is not merely cosmetic. Nor is it a passing enthusiasm. It is more than adaptation to changed cultural conditions. It is radical conversion, profound renewal in terms of a new theological vision.

The primary focus that unifies all the efforts at renewal of contemporary Religious is this changed understanding of ministry and world engagement. Ministry in the reality of our times, i.e., in the world, has become absolutely central to our identity. We have grasped, or been grasped by, the unity of the one great commandment. Effective love of the whole world, especially of the human family for whom Christ died and rose, is not a consequence of love of God or a secondary end flowing from a primary commitment to our own sanctification. Ministry is the necessary incarnation of our total love of God which cannot be contained in any single work. Articulating this realization is part of our current challenge as we attempt to understand, and help others understand, what our life means in the Church today. Let me offer just a few biblical resources toward articulating a new theology of “world” to which a new spirituality of engagement is a response.

The Fourth Gospel uses the Greek word for world, “kosmos,” 78 times, more than the rest of the New Testament put together. Obviously, the Evangelist was deeply concerned with this reality. Careful analysis of the Gospel’s nuanced use of the term reveals four different meanings of world: three positive and one negative. “World” refers first to *creation* itself. The

Gospel begins, evoking the creation account in Genesis (1:1-2:4a), “In the beginning....” As God spoke all things into existence and declared them “very good,” so that creative Word itself, through which all things were made, became flesh and dwelt among us. “World,” then, means creation, the whole universe, as emerging in goodness from God’s initiative through the Word.

This world is, second, the *theater of human history* into which every human being is born, including the Word made flesh. Between the two poles of his coming into the world and returning to God (see Jn. 16:23) he lives, works, and struggles as a real human being in real human history. His disciples are to be the continuation of his presence and action. The world, then, is our natural and only home during our historical sojourn. Jesus prays to God not to take his disciples out of the world but precisely to keep them safe from evil in the world (see Jn. 17:15) into which he sends them as the Father had sent him (see Jn. 17:18 and 20:21), to participate salvifically in the whole of the human enterprise.

A third positive meaning of world is captured in the text “God so loved the world as to give the only Son so that all who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Here “world” clearly means the whole *human family*. Jesus came to enlighten every human being (see Jn. 1:9), to draw to himself all people (Jn. 12:32). The world to which Jesus missions his disciples includes all creation, especially humanity as it makes its way through history.

But there is a fourth meaning of world in John. World is a *synonym for evil*, the domain and the work of the Prince of this World (see Jn. 12:31;14:30; 16:11), whom Jesus in John calls Satan (see Jn. 13:27), the Devil, the Father of Lies who is a murderer from the beginning (see Jn. 8:44). Jesus comes to engage in a struggle with this personal evil agency, a struggle which will cost him his life and which, he warns, will cost his disciples theirs if they take up his project. Because the world hates Jesus it will hate his disciples who are not of this world (see Jn. 15:18-19).

Significantly, Jesus often calls the expression of this personal evil agent simply “the world.” It is pervasive, integral to everything, coextensive with reality. There is no place, no group of people, no institution, no project in all God’s good creation that is untouched by evil. We cannot isolate evil and thereby control it. There is no place to hide from it. Jesus assured his disciples on the eve of his death that they could be confident because he has overcome the world (see Jn. 16:33), but it will be up to them to make his great work effective in every place and every age. He prays to God, “Now I am no longer in the world, but these (his disciples) are in the world. I do not pray that you take them out of the world (that is, out of history), but that you protect them from the Evil One” (Jn. 17:15). And he assures them and us that we will do his works, and even greater works than he has done (see Jn. 14:12). When, at our baptism, we renounced Satan and all his works and committed ourselves to life in Christ we became part of this great divine project. Religious Profession is a deepening, not an abandonment of or an escape from, this commitment.

In this more nuanced understanding of “world” as a complex arena in which the Reign of God and the Kingdom of Satan contend for control, evil is not some foreign monolith at the convent door which can and must be kept closed against it. Rather, good and evil intimately coexist in our world, and our mission is to subvert Satan’s project in order to promote the Reign of God. Among Jesus’ “Reign of God” parables in the Synoptic Gospels one in Matthew 13 is particularly enlightening, especially because Jesus himself interpreted it for us. It is usually entitled “The Weeds and the Wheat” (Mt. 13:24-30, 36b-42). A farmer sowed good seed in his field and while he was asleep weeds appeared. When his servants asked how this had happened the farmer said that an enemy had done it. Jesus then explained the parable allegorically: the field is the world, God’s good creation; the sower of the good seed is the Son of Man and that seed grows into children of the Reign of God; the enemy is the Evil One who sows bad seed that

grows into children of the Devil. The world, then, is a complex reality in which two forces struggle for control, that is, to take final control of the field and its human harvest.

But you will remember that the servants had originally asked if they should pull out the weeds and the owner of the field had said no, because they would likely also uproot the wheat. Does this mean that the servants (e.g., us) are just too clumsy to be entrusted with this delicate task so they should sit around and wait for the harvester angels to come at the end of time and do the job right? Or is Jesus, in this parable, explaining how things really are in this world and therefore what his disciples must do in the time between Jesus' good sowing and the end? Jesus says good and evil are so closely intertwined, so indistinguishable at times, so mutually supportive and even parasitic, that often we cannot make a clear-cut distinction between them. Good is rarely so pure and evil is often so apparently good that even those with sharp moral eyes and nimble ministerial fingers often cannot distinguish and separate them. We do not get to work in a world where good is good and bad is bad, where moral clarity shines like the noonday sun, where we need never tolerate or even at times be implicated in evil. Participation in the cultivation of the Reign of God is often morally agonizing, intellectually confusing, personally compromising.

B. Developing a Spirituality of Engagement

Many Religious began to experience the challenge of developing a deeper spirituality of ministerial engagement when they were no longer carrying out Church-assigned and constructed apostolates in all-Catholic settings with all Catholic colleagues, implementing (with usually untroubled consciences) clear Catholic teachings and policies, and where any real difficulties that might arise could be referred to someone in authority. Now they find themselves in situations where Church teaching or discipline sometimes conflicts with the needs of real people, where the possibility of scandal has to be balanced with actual demands of integrity and compassion, where non-Catholic colleagues or secular institutions are more evangelically

effective than parochial systems, where going along with policies they cannot, in conscience, accept is the price of staying available to people in need.

This is what it means to minister in, with, and for the world, in or outside of Church institutions, to, with, and among people of other or no religious affiliation rather than solely as part of an ecclesiastically-based institutional apostolate. Paul is perhaps the most eloquent expositor of this reality of living and working “unprotected” in a world which belongs to God but which is infiltrated at every level with limitation and even real evil. We cannot even begin to unpack Paul’s complex teaching, which scripture scholar Walter Wink has done so well in his three-volume work on “the principalities and powers.”²³ But Paul is using mythological language to talk about something very real, something Wink calls the “inside” of institutions, structures, systems. This inner “spirit” or “power” makes these realities ambiguously and simultaneously expressive of powerful, contending dynamics for good and for ill. These “spirits” or “powers” are not free standing beings but the energy moving realities of this world according to moral motivations that are nearly irresistible. Wink contends that our ministry in the world is largely a matter of naming (i.e., identifying), unmasking (i.e., clarifying), and engaging (i.e., discerning and resisting) the “evil powers” which operate through the systems of domination and oppression in this world.

These few exemplary resources from John, Matthew, and Paul are just indications that what we are struggling to understand and articulate in our Religious Life since the Council is not some idiosyncratic or flaky dabbling in novelty or excuse for self-indulgence. We are entering, in ways that have not been possible for women since the very first days of the Church, and certainly not for women Religious since the imposition in the 13th century of enclosure as

²³Walter Wink, *The Powers*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, 1986, 1992). The titles of the three volumes are instructive: *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (vol. 1); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (vol. 2); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (vol. 3).

essential to Religious Life,²⁴ into the Christian project that Jesus initiated, to which all his disciples are called by Baptism and Confirmation, and which we, by Profession, have made the project of our lives to the exclusion of any other primary life commitment.

By way of parenthesis, I would just mention here, but it is a topic for another paper, that I think we have a New Testament model for what we are creating in ministerial Religious Life, namely, the relatively small group of disciples whom Jesus called to join him on a 24/7 basis in his itinerant ministry. This group was not coterminous with the Twelve and it certainly did not include all of Jesus' disciples, nor even all of his favorites such as Martha and Mary and Lazarus. This intimate group who shared a common purse and had nowhere to lay their heads, included women and men whom Jesus called to put aside family, leave their primary family and home for good and not establish a secondary family, abandon all other occupations and commitments to be with him on the road and to devote themselves only and explicitly to his ministry.

VI. Implications for Vowed Religious Life of These Developments

I mentioned above some of the evident discontinuities between the traditional understanding of the constitutive features of Religious Life and the way ministerial Religious today are coming to understand these features. At this point, having considered the source and shape of these developments, let me very briefly bring them together in terms of three characteristics marking all the dimensions of the life today: vows, community, ministry, and witness.

²⁴Boniface VIII issued the decretal "Periculoso" in 1298. It imposed papal cloister on all nuns. Because the Council of Trent considered papal cloister the "primary obligation for nuns" it took nearly 400 years for Religious who modified cloister for the sake of nearly cloistered apostolates to be recognized as Religious. The virtual equation of Religious Life with cloistered life impeded the development of apostolic Religious Life and also was responsible for apostolic Congregations' maintaining virtually all the practices and customs of cloistered life even when they were exercising apostolates that required full days of external work. Only since Vatican II have apostolic Religious unburdened themselves of this "semi-cloistered" lifestyle and some Congregations continue to regard this lifestyle as intrinsic and even necessary for genuine Religious Life.

First, Religious in renewing Congregations today tend to be involved, to some greater or lesser degree, in a *personal process* that, in Jungian terms, would be called “*individuation*,”²⁵ not to be confused with “individualism.” Individuation refers to the life-long commitment to and process of becoming an authentic person who has and lives a spirituality in which the religious, intellectual, psychological, social, and professional dimensions of life have been integrated into a compelling and effective personal subject. For our IHM purposes the spirituality in question might be characterized by what our Constitutions call “participation in Jesus Christ and his redeeming mission.” Such a spirituality requires sound scriptural and theological foundations, personal psychological and social maturity, and the professional development required by the kind of ministry we have been discussing. Rather than being simply “Sister,” devoid of baptismal and family name, who should fit relatively smoothly into any local community and any Congregational assignment, and who strove above all to avoid “singularity” of any kind, today’s Religious is individuated by her appropriated personal history, her distinctive gifts, education, and experience, her personal spirituality, her interests and passions. Such individuated subjects, one would hope, can relate more personally and authentically to God, live more passionately, form more nourishing relationships in and outside the Congregation, and contribute more of their real selves to community and ministry than was possible in many earlier forms of the life. But at the same time developed individuality presents challenges for full affective incorporation in community and effective corporateness in ministry. Genuine self-sacrifice is required to participate whole-heartedly in a corporate reality in which one’s own

²⁵For a clear explanation of this process see Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the Psyche* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1992). A briefer presentation is available in Murray Stein, “Emergence of the Self (Individuation)”, in *Jung’s Map of the Soul: An Introduction* (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1998), 171-197. One does not have to think about this process in Jungian terms, although they are perhaps more accessible to the non-professional than those of some other psychological theories, but the process of maturation, no matter how it is theorized, is essential for human flourishing and therefore for a developed spirituality.

insights and deepest concerns, not to mention tastes and preferences, do not always prevail. If an unhealthy loss of self, i.e., having no self to sacrifice, was a danger in an earlier form of Religious Life, an unhealthy self-centeredness is a real danger today.

Secondly, the developments we have discussed have deeply affected *community life* which has been de-collectivized by the demise of the “total institution.” Few ministerial Religious today live what was once called “common life.” However, the collective lifestyle of monastic Religious Life, which is neither possible nor desirable for ministerial Religious in Congregations like ours, needs to be replaced by a new kind of unity rooted in *shared identity and expressed in genuine intimacy and active participation*. This challenge of how to really be a community and live community life while responding in a variety of ministries, often in locations where a number of members of the community cannot congregate, and living a variety of lifestyles that often are incompatible with the kind of primary group living many Religious grew up with, is perhaps the area that requires the most attention from ministerial Religious today. But a return to the total institution or a monastic form of community life, even in modified form, is probably not where we want to go.

Third, ministry in this new form of Religious Life has been *diversified and de-institutionalized* and this characteristic has influenced all other aspects of our lives. We might say that a *double discernment*, on the one hand of the gifts and callings of individual Religious, and on the other hand of the most pressing needs of the world, has replaced deployment of available Religious into already established apostolates. This de-institutionalization is changing the relationship between the hierarchy and Congregations, a change not always welcomed by bishops and pastors who once had large corps of Religious workers at their command. But it opens up considerable scope for Religious to discern and try to respond to the vast numbers of people, inside and outside the official Church, whose spiritual and other needs are not and may never be met by ecclesiastical institutions. De-institutionalization also raises theological issues

for Religious as individuals and as Congregations about what constitutes ministry in contrast to purely humanitarian endeavors or personally fulfilling careers. It has already helped precipitate serious economic and recruitment problems for Congregations.²⁶ The developments in the area of ministry are at the root of the changed meaning of vowed Religious Life today. Our working out of the meaning of ministry, our integration of our ministries into a solid corporate identity and lived practice, and a growing ability to articulate our new insights and commitments about ministry will foster this new form of Religious Life in the Church just as commitment to works outside the convent allowed apostolic Religious Life to finally emerge fully into the Church's definition of Religious Life in the early 20th century. But this area of our life is in serious need of prolonged corporate reflection and discussion. We have several decades of experience on which to reflect but have not yet found the proper forum and form for these discussions.

In summary, we undoubtedly have a lot of work ahead of us as we seek to be who we are as a Congregation of vowed Religious related to and enriched by an extended family of Associates, co-ministers, partners, and friends within the Church in Gospel-inspired ministry to the world. But it seems to me that we have every reason to be confident in our historical identity as IHM Religious and enthusiastic about our appropriation of the ministerial identity to which we were called by the Council and which has been confirmed by our experience over the past forty years. Difficult as it may be to "live in interesting times," it certainly beats the alternative! And as we strive to love this world as God loves it we will live our way, individually and corporately, into a deep understanding and appropriation of what it means to lay down our lives for those we love.

²⁶For an interesting and challenging analysis of some of the challenges raised by the de-institutionalization of the ministries of Religious Congregations, see Patricia Wittberg, "Ties That No Longer Bind," *America* 179 (September 26, 198): 10-14.

