



*“Walking towards a global, ecological and solidary conscience, we live the mission as disciples of Jesus in a changing world”.*

### **WOMEN INSPIRED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD ...**

*“...The General Chapter is a significant moment in our congregational journey. It is a paschal period in which together, we shall look at our reality and that of the world in which we live to discover the passage of God in our history, listen to his calls and the cries of humanity and of the cosmos and to advance towards the future with enthusiasm and hope,*

*All of us and in all spheres, we are invited to prepare our hearts, to tune up our ears and to purify our gaze in order to walk together in faith, attentive to what the Spirit would be revealing to us.*

*The same Spirit which took P. Butinya and M. Bonifacia to bet with radicalism and passion for the poor working world, especially for the woman, will accompany and encourage us along this chapter period, helping us to discern and to implement the ways which can better impel our life and mission”.* (Letter of convocation to the XXII General Chapter. 18-12-2015)

If all along the process we have tried to respond to the invitation of our General Coordinator to attune our ears ready, our gaze, our hearts, in short, attentive to the action of the Spirit..., upon arriving at the last phase, sent by our sisters throughout the Congregation, we want the maximum assurance of an ambience which is evangelical, a disposition of discernment.

We have the challenge before us to get away from our own cluster and provincial interests and preoccupations in order to assume the interests and preoccupations of the Congregation internationally; an obliged change of perspective for we have in this moment, the responsibility of the whole congregation. At the same time, as a congregational body, we feel the urgency to look at the entire world together, in its present context.

Which would be the **inevitable references**, the bottom line criteria to take into account, so that our vision, our way of proceeding and the decisions that we may take during these days, be evangelical?

#### **We live the mission as disciples of Jesus**

The Gospel tells us of two disciples of John who, invited by their own master, begin a new life journey beside Jesus. But Jesus, before anything else, indicates to them the manner of doing it. When the disciples asked him where he lives, Jesus offers them the better way of knowing not only *where*, but for *what and why* others may be able to follow him: “Come and you will see” (John1:39). That is to say, he offers himself as the **necessary primary reference, immediate and inspiring** to clarify one’s own existence.

And, if in the midst of our institutional preoccupations, which are longing to find the best direction for our Congregation, we would allow ourselves to say *let us go and let us see Jesus first, let us listen to His Words?* Even before putting on our tables topics, analysis, diagnostics, strategies for resolutions, planning timeframe...Perhaps we determine a fundamental contemplation of God himself in his revelation in history, in how his divine life was poured into reality and becomes the way of salvation. So as not to be completely absorbed by secondary questions- derived from the institutions' own logic, we need to stop on the *first plane*

This is how Jesus lived:

*“The experience of God that Jesus lived, fundamentally, was to discover in the core of his being the force capable of changing the optic of the ordinary. That primordial force which he called the Abba, was making himself present in everything that was happening around him and was urging him intimately and at times, painfully, to collaborate with her, because it was assuring great novelty in the course of events”.*<sup>1</sup>

That's the way it happened with the followers of Jesus: *before* knowing him, they were loaded with their personal aspirations, hidden desires and frustrations from some dreams. *After* knowing Jesus, those longings, desires and dreams were purified and took on new form. *Before* Jesus, *they ended up having a common vision, a project.* Much later they will have a crisis of dispersion which will sporadically happen in the group but they will overcome them when they return to remember Jesus as primary reference, as the origin of the first call. Without Him – as shown by experience – they don't know how to continue.

Our Constitutions say: “Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who had God as the absolute in their lives, whom they welcomed as their only riches and whom they passionately sought to do his will, are for us, encouragement and help in the joyful living of our vocation.” (C.21). “The communion of all the Siervas de San Jose in the search for the will of God within the Community-Taller urges us to share the capacity of being able to and to live the diverse services in the manner that Jesus *who set aside his condition and form as God, humbling himself, becoming as human beings are, because he came to serve humanity and not to be served by them*” (B.R. First Discourse. C 39).

Let us accept the invitation to allow our hearts to be transformed by the contemplation of the person and the life of Jesus, his simple and daily generosity, his words, his gestures, his coherence, his way of treating the poor, his total self-giving... Only this way can we recover the taste for God's mysterious way of relating in history (from the O.T, which will later be revealed fully in Jesus) and to give response “in Jesus' way” to situations very distinct from what he encountered and in very diverse context. From God ,, we shall see better, we shall choose better.

God's way of behaving in history, mysterious and paradoxical in the two fundamental movements, is *towards the other y towards the bottom.* that is, *to unite vs.to separate and go down vs. go up.* The God of Jesus Christ is community, convokes, unites, generates solidarity and is a God that goes down and reveals himself from below. “He is the son of the carpenter”. (Mk 6:3) His lowering himself is the scandal which was never totally overcome.

Paul captured the message well when he writes to the Christians of Corinth: “When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with

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<sup>1</sup> Xavier QUINZA, sj. Signos de Dios en lo Cotidiano, Ed. Frontera, Vitoria, 2003, 64

persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of the Spirit.” (1Cor. 2, 1-5).

### **We follow Jesus in Nazareth according to the Charism received from our Founders**

(Cfr. C.24)

For those whom we have committed ourselves with a particular charism within the Church, that **Charism is also an obligatory frame of reference** in our personal and institutional discernment.

Pope Francis, in his *Apostolic Letter to all the Consecrated*, reminds us how at the beginnings of each institute, the action of God is present which, in his Spirit, calls some persons to follow Christ closely, to interpret the Gospel in a particular way of life, to read with eyes of faith the signs of the times, to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. An initial experience which will later grow and develop in new geographical and cultural contexts, giving life to new initiatives and new ways of carrying out the Charism (n° 1).

The Congregational project which we carry in earthen vessel is built on a concrete and particular experience of the Spirit which brot forth in life and in the faith of Bonifacia and Butinya and incarnated itself in a project lived by our first sisters amidst lights and shadows, in accord with the culture and the social and ecclesial challenges of Spain in the XIX century, within a framework of understanding of the reality and of the faith very different from ours.

The vitality of religious life in every period needs men and women who, marked by evangelical radicalness like those of the Founders, live as disciples of Jesus in their new contexts; vibrant communities, simple and open, impassioned for the mission and with a *strong charismatic identity*. We, therefore, need constant discernment to verify if our praxis is responding to the needs of the Church and of the world in the new realities, and if it is coherent with our Charism. Our priority commitment does not so much concern the congregational survival, more than the prophetic mission to keep alive TODAY the Charism which our Founders bequeathed to us.

Today, they tell us:

*We leave you as legacy the working women, principal addressee of our mission; may they be the favorite of your eyes. You live in a time when the risks for their dignity have taken new faces and you have to search for them with courage...*

*Live and proclaim the gospel of work, making it the special place of encounter with God, space for humanization and liberation which would favor the dignity of the men and women worker. Look for the unification of the person in the harmony of prayer and work and, in dedicating yourselves to the promotion of the poor woman worker, take care of an integral formation leading to the process of empowerment. Do not forget that you have to live the mission inserted in the poor working world. It is your social place, following Jesus, worker in Nazareth. You have given steps along this path, but do not get tired. Remember that the core of the spirituality of the Siervas de San Jose, harmonize prayer and work under the protection of St. Joseph, is directed in the same manner to the sisters and “the other women and sheltered” (F.B. Reglamento 1874 and C. 1881). To transmit and share the spirituality with the lay is, for us, an exigency of our vocation.*

*Before anything and above all else, we recommend the love for one another and for everybody, distinctive seal of the followers of Jesus. Have as your “principal rule of conduct an unblemished love for God and for neighbors” (F.B. Reglamento 1875) she will lead you to become more attentive to the character and the likes of others than that of your own (B.R. Discursos) .*

*You are not alone, we are committed to be by your side so that the Charism may always be alive. Do not be disheartened in seeing the actual situation of the religious life; may the faith and confidence in God be your strongest support. We did not have lesser difficulties in the beginning; but we continued moving on with our eyes fixed in the Lord. When failure seemed to be the only reality, we continued trusting. At the end, as you know: life burst forth, the grain gave much fruit.*

### **We walk towards a global, ecological and solidary conscience**

Pope Francis frequently talks about a Church in exit, of peripheries to discover, of ‘other places’ where to situate ourselves for a new fruitfulness. We are asked with frequency for a new exodus: from ourselves, from our little world, from rigid preconceptions or theoretical illusion, to dwell on the planes, to conquer the globalization of indifference, to bring ourselves concretely closer to the afflicted and the marginalized.

We quote some paragraphs from a text of Marta Zechmeister<sup>2</sup> for its lucidity and the clarity with which she expresses its significance for the consecrated life **“the authority of those who suffer” as inevitable criteria for discernment.**

*“How do we find the will of God in the day to day, concrete reality of our life without deceiving ourselves and without falling into infantilism? Where does God speak to us in an “infallible” way?*

*God’s authority certainly, does not make itself present as an exultation in its manifestation of power- neither of political power nor sacred power – but in that which seems its opposite. The full authority of God is really present, has its body and visibility, in the most vulnerable, in the powerless, in the victims. Jesus himself in his famous parable of the last judgement (Mt. 25) places the totality of the history of humanity under the authority of those who suffer.*

*No authority, neither the highest authority in the hierarchy of the Church is above this authority. Obedience and an adult love for the Church know that this is the most noble vocation in the religious life, the service we truly owe the Church: submit ourselves to the authority of the victims and prophetically reclaim that the whole Church has to configure and define itself from this authority. If it does not do it, it is disfiguring the face of Jesus Christ.*

*To live the vow of obedience under the authority of those who suffer is a complex process with multiple dimensions: personal and communitarian, mystical and political. However, everything starts with something simple and elemental: to awaken from our narcissism and our self- referring world and open the eyes and hearts to the suffering of other human beings. What is decisive is to resist the temptation to look at the other side or take refuge in apathy (Cfr. Lc 10:25-37)*

*But we know very well that many times life is very confusing and ambiguous... and the difficult and disturbing question emerges: How can the message of the parable of the good Samaritan be translated in the context of a globalized world? Today, it is not one who has fallen into the hands of bandits, but a decisive part of humanity is at their mercy. Here, a serious and profound discernment is demanded to know how to defend the life of the victims before this massive threat. To obey the authority of those who suffer requires, in this dimension, all our knowledge and all our sciences, it requires our creativity and imagination in order to create with efficiency, spaces which would make life in this real world flourish, disfigured by sin and by the structure of sin.*

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<sup>2</sup> Martha ZECHMEISTER, cj. La autoridad de los que sufren.

*Until now there is value in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great martyr of the German Lutheran Church, said in his historical context: it is no longer sufficient to attend to the victims under the wheel”, but we are asked to “block the spoke to stop the wheels”.*

It deals with a criterion of discernment today, yesterday and always, because it is a basic criterion of the gospel of Jesus.

On the other hand, in our actual, globalized world, it is getting clearer every time that one cannot dissociate solidarity with those who suffer from the care of creation. As asserted by Pope Francis in his last encyclical and the *Diary 2030 for the Sustainable Development*, approved in the United Nations Summit in September 2015.

*“The human environment and the natural environment decompose together and we will not be able to adequately confront the environmental degradation if we do not pay attention to causes which have something to do with human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and that of the society affect, in a special way, the weakest of the planet: the common experience of ordinary life as well the scientific investigation show that the poorest people suffer the gravest effect of all environmental aggression” (Laudato Si, 48).*

*“Sustainable development comes from the basis that the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, the struggle against inequality in countries and among them, the preservation of the planet, the creation of sustained economic growth, inclusive and sustainable ... are connected among them and are interdependent”. (Agenda 2030 n. 13)*

Let us see the invitations directed to us by our Constitutions and Directory:

“We carry out our mission inserted in the poor working world like Jesus in Nazareth, who was sent to announce the Good News to the poor and chose to live among them. Like him, we live among the poor, sharing their social setting, searching together with them, in the light of the Gospel and according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, paths to justice and solidarity and ways of working that are dignifying and liberating” (C. 56). We live in a permanent personal and communal attitude of solidarity with the poor and commitment to justice and human dignity. We are in solidarity with creation, respecting the environment, defending ecology and working with other groups for the promotion of Justice, peace and integrity of creation” (D.19 & 21).

If we want to give dynamism to our apostolic substance, we cannot set aside the *exposure to the world*. The process of immobility in persons and institutions who lose contact with the reality are very evident. Immobilization which can be translated into giving old and misguided solutions to problems completely new, for fear of going against the structure where we find ourselves.

Let us expose our hearts open, let us not allow it to be shielded nor to build castle in the air. It is only when we allow reality to appeal to the heart and directly draw up questions, can the dynamics of mercy be fanned into flames.

### **In a changing world...**

A world in constant evolution and change not only in nature and in the cosmos but also in social, cultural, political and economic spheres; with all that it implies, among other things, of new paradigms and new problematic situations, require new reconsiderations, new approaches, including, new kind of language. From there, we may be experiencing difficulties of transition above all, in what refers to paradigm shift, the feeling of incompatibility of perspectives, resistances to new approaches, eventual

partial drawing back, coexistence of contrary stances ...making advances in the midst of this period of multiple transition, laborious and difficult.

Jose M. Arzaiz thus analyzes:

*We cannot forget that the present form of religious life – its structures, organization, methods of working, style of life – do not respond adequately to the needs and the challenges of a society that has changed and is changing radically... it deals with epochal change which signifies a change in our manner of understanding a human person and his relations with the world and with God leading us to a new paradigm.*

*As never before, consecrated life has to avoid spending its energy in internal and ideological criticism and live more in the affirmative, alternative and open to real pluralism, recognizing that the Spirit comes in distinct forms to build the Church and multiply the life of our people. She has to germinate and to allow to germinate the seed of a new society, in accord with the plan of the Kingdom of God and a new manner of being Church, made of community of communities. All these mean great changes which every Charism will have to incarnate in its original tradition and no one will be exempt from situating oneself in that wavelength. It is a line of wisdom, profoundly marked by faith and is in continuous cultural and religious dialogue, open to the poor of all times and of the present and to those who generate new way of thinking and new way of doing.*

At the bottom, it is the usual great challenge: search and find God in the path of life, through discernment processes, alone with a more holistic awareness of the world and the cosmos to discover the new spaces of life and mission which are emerging in our society.

*Cajar, April 2017*