

# Challenges of Religious life in Europe

Sister Enrica Rosanna fma



## Father August Hülsmann scj, president of UCESM: presentation of Sister Enrica Rosanna

We are very happy and grateful to have with us Sister Enrica Rosanna fma, a woman of long-standing experience. She has spent 40 years in Religious Life, she is a Daughter of Mary help of Christians, and equally Sr. Rosanna throughout her entire religious life has studied what goes on in society. In analysing society, she has always been very interested in the way in which religion exists in society and she has also dealt with pastoral issues. She was a professor in various universities and colleges.

About a year ago in Rome, I met her and invited her if she was interested in joining us at this Assembly. It wasn't an easy task to reach her, I must say, in the building for the Religious' Congregation in Vatican - CICALSAL-, she has an office, but she is hardly ever there: because a lot of people come to see her and wish to speak with her! When I was waiting for her at her office I noticed that she receives dozens of phone calls every day... I invited her to come to speak to us and she said yes: I'd like to thank her very warmly for that.

First of all, thank you for having invited me here today. I must say: that I gave the same talk in Freising. When I re-read it I threw it away because I realise that the situation in Europe has changed a great deal. What I said some years ago runs the risk of no longer making any sense today!

I must convey to you the greetings of Mgr. Rode, the Prefect and of the Secretary Father Eusebio. Through me, they wish to send a message of hope and of good wishes.

*Now I'm not going to give you a scientific lecture. I reflected at length on this. I'm a sociologist by training and what I wish to do is based on my background to provide you with some experiential and pastoral thoughts.*

I'd like to begin with a quotation: ***"The eye sees only sand, but the enlightened heart is capable of seeing beyond the end of the desert and the fertile land."***

This is an oriental proverb and gives you an idea of the spirit with which I'll be tackling this issue. My heart will be full of hope!

**The hope** was the red thread which guided the second Synod on Europe, the title of which was "Jesus Christ living in his Church, a source of hope for Europe". *This is also the red thread* which I think should guide the difficult moments of history, inclusive of the history of Religious Life in Europe. "As long as there is life there is hope...and as long as there is hope there is life"...

**We need hope and to reach the fertile land** which for each one of us means "having the power and the strength, to be daring at means, having the ability to come up with new things all the time, the willingness to have new hopes, the inebriation of walking together in generous solidarity, and deep communion," in a word what this means is *"Duc in altum with trusting optimism!"*. Apostolic letter of Joan Paul II, 2000, Novo Millenio ineunte 58.

It would be terrible for us, consecrated men and women, **not to be optimistic**. Without optimism we would not be able to give a significant contribution to our Europe, the Blessed land that hosts us and gives us its riches. We need hope and this to acquire the Wisdom that Consecrated Life which lives in Europe today needs, **Wisdom, which is one of the gifts of the Spirit**. I will say later on that in some situations we need the Wisdom of darkness,

because of the crisis of vocations, secularisation and the ageing of our brothers and sisters. This Wisdom we need to draw from the Book of Hope, which is the revelation in the light of which the Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Europa" states the following. I quote from Revelation: "Let anyone who can hear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches", Ap 2.7. "Don't be afraid. It is I, the Last and the First. I am the living One", Ap 1.17-18. "Wake up. Put some resolve into whatever vigour you have left. It is dying fast. Take that open scroll... Take it and eat it...", Ap 10.8-9.

**"Duc in altum"**, Antoine of St. Exupery says, with an open and magnanimous spirit: "If you wish to build a boat, don't try to get together people to collect timber, to prepare the equipment, to distribute tasks or organise work and wood to repair the tackles. Instead try to awaken in them their longing for the open and infinite sea." We need to awaken in ourselves *this longing for the open sea* and perhaps *we need to re-awaken the longing for God inside of us*.

### **But what is a snapshot of this Europe which needs hope so greatly? What are the challenges that Consecrated Life has to grapple with today?**

The XX<sup>th</sup> century essentially witnessed **three revolutions**:

- The Russian revolution which brought to power Marxism in Eastern Europe which then gave way to Communism.
- The fascist Revolution which witnessed the affirmation, both in Italy and in Germany, of a very strong idea countering both Communism and Capitalism and that sought to give a new identity to the old Continent.
- The technical and scientific revolution was instead, not a national or violent revolution. I am talking about the emergence and expansion of the era of technology and globalisation with all of the consequences that brought about in our customs in our way of thinking and acting and in our culture and in European society altogether.

This revolution, the offspring of liberalism, today has won and it seems to co-exist without any traumas with the outcomes of the two previous revolutions; Europe both Eastern and Western Europe bears both the dram and the burden of this revolution. The burden and the dream that co-exist with the threat that causes us to hold our breath, the terrorism. It suffices to think of Beslan, of Moscow in Russia, of London in England, of Madrid in Spain...They are not just a memory and we know that full well. For those of us who live in Rome, we know full well how the threat of terrorism looms near...

#### **The burden and the dream:**

The great betrayed dream led enormous masses of people to crowd, to the boundaries of our continent, in search of an ephemeral and virtual Eldorado which actually does not exist.

*Internal migrations, trends of people moving from East to West but also from the so-called Third world, from Asia, South America and from Africa.* Masses of people that uprooted entire generations from their own cultural and religious roots, introduced them into a socio-cultural reality with perspectives, customs, ways of living and doing which are totally different from those of their origins. Individual and mass migration flows, which in the hands of people without scruples, have

become a way to introduce people into mafia, drugs, and the low-life in general.

**The burden and the dream** of a situation characterised by cultural pluralism and a religious market that knows no precedent laden with conflict, a setting in which what seems to prosper is the dictatorship of relativism, in which one simply loses the sense of the sacred and particularly one loses the respect for the sacred in the loftiest sense, the respect for God. Mgr. J. Ratzinger 'Europa' Rome, 13 May 2004.

Our relationship with Muslims becomes all the more urgent because of migration flows that needs to be carefully studied. This is a huge challenge for us today. The events of the past couple of days are showing this very vigorously.

**A burden and a dream** of a global scenario in which we see co-existing alarming signs of degradation but also seeds of hope which strive to carve a fertile land in which they can prosper:

- *We have the loss and the rejection of the Christian legacy* accompanied by practical agnosticism and indifference. **At the same time**, however, we have a re-affirmation that Europe simply cannot leave Jesus Christ behind, because Jesus Christ was the humus, the medium in which European people were able to develop their roots.
- *We have the fear of facing the future*, with the consequent loss of the meaning of life, **but at the same time**, we find a very deep-seated quest for meaning that especially characterises the younger generations.
- *We have a greater loneliness*, even those who have plenty of material goods, we have *a crisis of belonging, especially for immigrants* who have a very difficult time in finding their social place in their new society **but at the same time** we find attitudes and initiatives of solidarity and collaboration.
- *We see the attempt to re-affirm an anthropology without Christ and without God* combined with the triumph of the silent apostasy of the satiated man who lives as if God never existed. **At the same time**, however, we also find the courage to assert the truth of God and the truth of the human person as the foundation of the inalienable rights of each man.

- *We also find bolder and bolder experiments of human manipulation and **at the same time** a commitment to build a culture of Life.*

**The burden and the dream** of a great complex and ambiguous scenario which becomes a great call for the Church and a fortiori of Consecrated Life, mine and yours, that we want to devote entirely to the Kingdom.

### **The aspects of burden**

We have to reckon with the complex and ambiguous context which is not only not Christian but tendentious, that judges Christianity from top to bottom as one would look at an old garment that has gone out of fashion.

We seem to hear the echo of a question that is 2000 years old:

“From Nazareth can anything good come from that place?” Jn 1.46

Jesus in his preaching is a loser at the outset. He comes from a place that is despised. He is not known as a rabbi but as an artisan. Mc 6,3 He is not part of the clergy of Sanhedrim. He is not part of the chosen elite. He is not even an authority in the political, economic or cultural sense. There is only one man that gives him credit publicly, John the Baptist, but Herod eliminates him. Thus Jesus begins his race to communicate, to convey a message that his people “would have never listened to” Jn 1,11, but that we did take up that we wish to listen to, that we have listened and experimented with in the light of his Passover which gives us the courage to proclaim it.

**The burden even** within Consecrate Life which has fallen prey to ageing, to vocational crisis, to defections, but that still is looking for other ways to continue to live out the Wisdom of the darkness that harbours the hope to live a different future.

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, I was in St Peter’s Basilica. For the whole time of the celebration with the Pope, I was in great pain for I thought of all the people that I have known during this time and who have left Religious Life. I was thinking, I wonder where Sisters and brothers are today... and I wonder what happened to brothers and to sisters... When they left Religious Life, they slammed the door behind themselves. I thought to myself, today they are not here but perhaps they are in great pain. We must not abandon them... I was in terrible pain thinking about them. *So the Wisdom of darkness, in the framework of this discourse on Wisdom, we find our solidarity with those who have chosen a different path.*

**The dream which is a challenge:** because we must love a world that despises us and convey to it a message which it is not ready to accept. We expect it to be rebuffed, but this is not a reason to be downcast. It is dejection that the seed dies, but God is stronger and he is so strong that he can bring back to life what people kill. Jesus prepared us when he said: “When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?” Lc 18.8

**A dream** which is already a reality for consecrated life: charisms continue to bear witness to the Gospel in spite of the drop in the number of vocations and the ageing

process. Communities of contemplative life that accept vocations precisely in the countries that seems to be most touched by secularism. This morning in the various presentations we saw that Spain has about 900 monasteries and Italy has 600. That is above and beyond that crisis that seems to be sweeping over monasteries. They continue to be oases of prayer. We see communities that live where there is greater social exclusion. We see communities of consecrated men and women that come into being to meet the needs that stem from new forms of poverty: drugs, AIDS, prostitution, child abuse, the trafficking of women... Religious communities are sought after as places for comfort for the spirit and others, like in Taizé, become a haven for thousands of youth. *New forms of consecrated life come into being constantly and communities that were founded in ancient times continue to be places of joy and communion.*

We must expect rejection and be prepared for that, but we must be certain that the time that we are living today is a time of God. Certain it is concretely possible to communicate faith to the men and women of today. That faith has in itself a humanising power and it is capable of making history and building solidarity and civilisation.

*We are certain that faith leads us to take up the ineluctable questions of the human person and to find in Jesus the answers to them both ethically, anthropologically and historically as well.*

We are also certain that with the power of God inside us, we can let ourselves be involved without being crushed by contemporary changes. We can understand them. We can interact with them critically because Christianity is capable of stirring to the good even the current historical processes. We are certain that we will be able to find an answer even when we are faced with inevitable questions. What do we do to face our internal problems: e.g. the advancing age, the fragility of the younger generations and the drastic number of declining vocations? What about the problems of the mission? How do we carry out evangelisation in economically wealthy, but de-Christianised countries, in the poorest and weakest countries both economically and spiritually? *These are all provoking questions!*

**The dream** in the perspective of faith is certainty. This faith is our challenge, ours is a time of faith. If it is then, why not dare **to be hopeful?**

*I’d like to go back to a quotation of the Gospel: “Once he called to him the twelve, Jesus sent them forth after saying to them: Preach, because the Kingdom of heaven is close. Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life and heal the lepers.” Mt 10.5-7*

Each one of us, I think, today in Europe is the thirteenth apostle, and each one of us writes his or her fifth Gospel and receives the same mission as the twelve. Go, heal the sick, bring the dead back to life and heal the lepers. There is no school that can teach us to become an apostle except the school of Jesus, because it is not the words that count but the passion, the awe that they contain. How can we bear witness to the fact that God is close if we do not have this burning passion inside us?

How can we if we do not believe that there is abundant harvest and that it is He who has sown the seeds? How can we if there are no gestures of piety and compassion?

*The twofold mission of the apostle today and forever is one and the same: to exist for God, to heal life and to believe that the fields of God are not arid but that they are full of harvest. That harvests need to be threshed, collected, milled, ground, and turned into dough so that they will become bread.*

Europe is a harvest. It is an abundant harvest. Let us therefore be bold enough to be hopeful and ask ourselves what we can concretely do.

**First of all we must trust God and his Gospel.** The Gospel of hope does not disappoint. We must trust Him. I say this for myself but sometimes I don't trust in the vicissitudes of history both in the past and today. The Gospel is a light that enlightens us and shows us the way. It is strength that supports us in times of trial. It is the prophecy of a new world. It is the indication of a new beginning. It is an invitation to walk down new avenues that will lead us to the Europe of the Spirit so that we make it a true common home where it may be joyful to live together.

### **What can we do then?**

Well recently his Excellency Mgr. Amedee Grab, president of CCEE, said at a conference that was held in the Vatican to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Perfectae Caritatis:

'Recently I have come to realise that there is something new that is going on in this new European house and it is particularly interesting and significant for consecrated life. There are signs that Europeans are beginning to search - according to Mgr. Grab - this is the challenge. Europeans are looking for something. The recent tragedies that have shaken the world have led to the collapse of idolatrous certainties and have brought back to the fore issues that are important to humankind. Humankind has been the driving force of the old Europe but now the old Europe that has always shaped history must assume this burden.'

**It is up to us, consecrated men and women, to walk down these avenues of research with our brothers and sisters to substantiate the hope that is inside of us and**

**to contribute to the building of the common house which is our house and that of everyone.** It is up to us to take on the commitment, to play the role that was played in the building of Europe by Benedict and Bernard, by Cyril and Methodius, Francis, Dominic, Catherine, Teresa, Francis de Sales, Brigid, Philip Neri, John Bosco, and allow me to quote my founder and Edith Stein and many other men and women with their religious families.

But as Vita Consecrata reminds us, let me quote:

"The message of Christ...**requires serious preparation, mature virtues of discernment,** and a faithful adhesion to the necessary criteria of doctrinal orthodoxy, authenticity and ecclesial communion. This search is advantageous for consecrated persons themselves. The uncovered values can indeed induce consecrated persons themselves to increase their commitment to contemplation and prayer and to practice more intensely community sharing and hospitality. It can lead them to cultivate with greater diligence care for the person and respect for nature", VC79.

I am now going to skip another passage that I had intended to read from Vita Consecrata:

"By their charisms, consecrated persons become signs of the Spirit pointing to a new future enlightened by faith and by Christian hope. *Eschatological expectation becomes mission*, so that the Kingdom may become ever more fully established here and now", VC27.

"Come, Lord Jesus!" is accompanied by another: "Thy Kingdom come!", Mt 6.10.

Those who vigilantly await the fulfilment of Christ's promises are able to bring hope to their brothers and sisters who are often discouraged and pessimistic about the future. Theirs is a hope founded on God's promise contained in the revealed word: the history of humanity is moving towards "a new heaven and a new earth" Rev 21.1, where the Lord "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away", Rev 21.4. The consecrated life is at the service of this definitive manifestation of the divine glory, when all flesh will see the salvation of God cf. Lk 3.6; Is 40.5", VC27.

Let us therefore ask ourselves

**What priority pathways can we walk down in order to take up the challenges that I mentioned?**

I have actually identified four that are not exclusive<sup>3</sup> although they are priorities:

**The question of the truth**

**The issue of the centrality of the person,**

**The challenge of love and the challenge of peace.**

## The question of the truth

Mgr. Grab had already mentioned this on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Perfectae Caritatis. He said that there is a formidable challenge out there. Europe, like most of the West, has emphasized scientific and technological research. The third revolution that I mentioned, had remarkable success, but today I think that it is clear to us all that the achievements of scientific and technological achievements are escaping us. The hegemonic claim of an eye that has made itself the centre of the world and that has alienated God from the world and this type of tendency has brought about destructive rifts throughout the planet.

I think what we really need to go back to, in this new Europe of ours, particularly in this new political entity, is the sense of truth.

**“But what is truth?”** In the different aspects of ideologies that over the past centuries have marked Europe, the question which is the very same one as that posed by Pilate, remains unanswered.

Now for us if we wish to shed light on anything we need to go back to the Gospel. “I am the Truth” said Christ the Lord.

Therefore the truth is not a fleeting reality which serves the reality of certain political and social, and cultural agendas. Truth has nothing to do with the prevailing ideologies. Nor does it have to do with the alternation of philosophies. Although the various philosophies may give a contribution to the search for truth, they do not bring us to that certainty that brings peace to the heart because that comes from something which is higher up and more remote, something that comes from God.

When St. Benedict, at the very beginning of Christian Europe, wrote his rule, he laid down a pillar upon which we built not only the nascent cenobitic life but the truth which constituted Europe. “At the centre of St. Benedict’s monastic experience we find a simple principle, typical for the Christian that the monk takes on in its full radical nature, to build the unity of one’s life around the primacy of God. This is the point, God’s primacy, to build the unity of one’s life, the truth of one’s person on the primacy of God”, John Paul II, Letter.

It is interesting that precisely in the prologue to his rule St Benedict has written an authoritative word and a therapeutic word. I might add, a word for contemporary Europe which is with great difficulty searching for a pseudo-truth or truths in the plural which are man-made in the selfish race for pleasure power and richness.

We find in the rule of St. Benedict, in the Prologue, **“Place nothing before the love of Christ”**. This is both an ancient and a very new principle just as the sun is new every morning when it rises, when it renews light and warmth and the joy in which we relate to reality. Bonhoeffer used to say: “Christ is in the facts.” He helps us to get back to this priority which is the love of Christ who is the incontestable truth of history. M. Guzzi, Rome 2005 “The new humanity”, p80.

**Christ is the truth of my history, of your history, of our history**, that of those who with St. John rest all expectations on this certainty of Faith.

“Et nos credidimus caritati quam Deus in nos habet’. All the love of God who is Charity, the very substance of truth”, 1 Jn 4.16; 1 Jn 4.8.

The psalms also say to us that: *“the ways of the Lord are truth and grace”*, Ps 25.10. And this persuades us that there is a search for truth that goes beyond the acquisitions of human thinking; there is a doing, a creation of truth in charity that deeply unites the heart and life.

When the followers of Christ commit themselves to the living out of what St. John says: “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us...”, 1 Jn 3.18-19.

The apostle of love writes: *“I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth”*, 3 Jn 4.

Thus we must not be afraid!

For this, personal conversion continued to the truth of love is deeply rooted in history; we’ll become men and women: the makers of our own history.

**The question of the dignity of the human person**, the person before everything else.

**The person, each person, weak or strong, white or black, from the East or from the West, is at the centre of the world, has the right to be respected, and valued.**

Respect and appreciation are a right of all and not a privilege of some. So many times we have heard and shared these words and yet so many times precisely in Europe, we have seen a people being trodden upon abused, pushed to the side and insulted.

This makes me think of an assertion made by Cardinal Stepinac, who today is blessed, during a homily on the feast of Christ the King on October 31, 1943. He said, and I quote: “The Catholic Church does not know masters and races of slaves. The Catholic Church only knows the creatures of God, and if it holds some in greater esteem than others, it is those who have the noblest heart and not the strongest fist. For the Catholic Church the black man of Africa is as much a man as the European. For the Church, both the King in the royal palace and the gypsy in his tent are equally men.” G. Ravasi, *The sower of the Word*, 2004, p265.

There are no boundaries or no barriers of race or language. There are no conditions of development or thinking. ***There are no political ideologies or cultural trends that can delete the Face of God hidden behind the life of every human person.***

And yet still today racism dangerously pokes its ugly head. On October 25<sup>th</sup> of 2005, I read in the free City paper. It is actually given out free of charge in metro-stops. I read that in California two adolescents called Lynx and Lamb, “sing in praise of the white man”. They want other people to call them “Prussian Blue”, they sing songs of hatred. They are 14 and 15 years of age. When interviewed by ABC network they said: “They

were proud to be white and they wanted to remain such and to preserve the race. They said they did not like this chaos, this great ethnic confusion that prevails today.” I don’t think that I need to add anything to this.

We in Europe know that this is not an isolated fact. I’m thinking back to Beslan. In particular to the terrorist women who, paradoxically during the celebration of a feast of peace, killed hundreds of people, most of them children.

“Beslan strikes one and is terrifying because we realise that women who are those who give life in the womb and who preserve that life with all of their being, were those who perpetrated the murder of many. I will remember always the running of those desperate and naked children, abused in their innocence even by women who should teach and preserve caution. This is the sign that we have gone beyond the limit, beyond that inner confine that exists in man’s heart that is seen as the safeguard or bulwark of dignity. I think that Beslan is in our hearts and we have those scenes ever before our eyes”, D. Vitali, *Se la pace è donna*, 2005, p8.

Today, the person risks no longer being the yardstick of cultural dynamics, we are all very much aware that there will be a greater dehumanisation and that more and more there will be a severe anthropological crisis.

I think that it is really underlying or the common denominator of all the crises that characterise the globalisation process. The true gamble of globalisation, **the third revolution which I mentioned and which involves us all personally, its deep seated meaning is not mainly economic or social, nor is it political, rather it is anthropological.**

Therefore the challenge that we must meet, first and foremost by us Consecrated men and women, is to ensure a globalisation process that is centred or focussed on the person, a globalisation of solidarity. Indeed, *only the centrality of the person can lead us to appreciate communion between individuals and peoples beyond all systems, ideas and ideologies.* Only the centrality of the human person can lead us to uncover the true meaning of relations and what the other, who is no longer seen as the enemy or a competitor, can offer. It leads us to develop the paradigm of a planetary civilisation and at the same time a plural one. It leads us to preserve the universal dimension of each culture in a spirit that is open to differences and to multiple cultures without any will to standardise everything.

We are not cloned human beings. The centrality of the human person is something that leads us to enhance the identity of each and every one of us and to appreciate differences and the peculiar aspects of each human person. The human person is not something that may be used as an instrument. It is not something that may be dominated or manipulated; it cannot be sacrificed to history or to the fame of major economic or political interests. The human person needs love. He grows in an environment of love. He must be respected and protected always.

We, Consecrated men and women must bear witness that only faith in God the Father, can in a sacred and holy way, found the value of the human person. Only

that can relate us to a world where the others are our brothers and sisters with whom dialogue and familiarity must be a daily reality which makes it possible to live together which does not leave us without defence and which actually protects us, It is a dialogue in which the communion of diversity means partaking in personal richness. **It is a dialogue which is based on the particular relationship that Revelation describes as the three Divine Persons in the one triune God. This relationship helps us to see the better part of the other and to bring out the best part of one-self.** It converts the foreigner into a friend. It frees from the demon of violence and builds peace. Dialogue is the art of the brave which heals the wounds of division and regenerates our life in its profoundest dimension. Without this quality dialogue, there will be no European common house.

The great Pope John Paul II, speaking of Europe, wrote in these words:

*«The civil authorities should ensure that European structures and institutions always remain at the service of man, who can never be regarded as an object to be bought or sold, exploited or manipulated. He is a person, created in the image of God, who reflects the benevolent love of the Creator and Father of all. Every man and woman, whoever they may be, whatever their origin or condition of life, deserves absolute respect. The Church does not cease to recall these basic principles of social life. Today, in view of the prospects opened by science, particularly genetics and biology, in view of the phenomenal development of the means of communication and exchange at a global level, Europe can and must work to defend everywhere the dignity of man, from the moment of conception, to improve his living conditions by working for a just distribution of wealth, and by giving an education to all people, which will help them to become active in social life, and employment, which will allow them to live and provide for the needs of their loved.»*

## **And now the question of love**

**In Europe, in the families, in communities can we really still speak of love?** Or is this one of the many words that is abused, tainted or corrupted? **And yet there is such a great need for love!**

Each one of us grows if he/she is loved. As Mulieris dignitatem reminds us: “The woman cannot find herself again unless she gives love to others” and “God entrusts man to her in a special way.” This indicates the ability to elevate love based on life, to free her of the demon of selfishness, to accept the bond of interdependency and to find in it the roots of true solidarity. It is then the duty of the female universe to remind us that: “Man cannot live without love. He continues to be an incomprehensible being for himself. His life is devoid of all meaning if love is not revealed to him, if he does not experience love and if he does not make love his own feeling, if he does not partake of love actively”, *Redemptoris hominis* 10.

In this perspective we remind ourselves that God made man in his own image and likeness. This means that

when God called man: "To exist for love he called him at the same time to embrace love", Familiaris consortium 11.

Now on January 26, Pope Benedict XVI gave us a wonderful encyclical on love: **Deus Caritas Est**. In the first paragraph, he delineated the task which he had set out for himself the wish of his heart, the heart of a father and pastor: **"To arouse in the world a new dynamism, a human answer to divine love."** 1

This is a call for us, consecrated men and women, to renew our commitment to evangelisation, so that every man and every woman may respond with love to the ineffable love with which God has loved us.

We cannot live without love. I cannot live without love and I think this goes for you too. A brave woman Annalena Tonelli, an Italian, tells us this with a witness of her life and her death. She was an Italian missionary, a lay-woman, who was assassinated by a terrorist group in October 2003 in Boroma, the former British Somalia where she devoted her energies to the poor and the suffering.

She wrote the following: *"Nothing makes sense outside of love. My life has known many dangers. I have risked life many times. For years I have lived in the midst of war. I have experienced in my own flesh and through those that I love, the evil side of man, his perversity, his iniquity, his cruelty and I have come out of that experience with a very important belief which is that the only thing that counts is to love."*

Annalena is not the only daughter of Europe that has given her life for others; rather she is part of a long series of witnesses which also includes many, many consecrated persons. John Paul II in his homily of February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001 also recalled this when he said:

*"Christ is the salvation and hope for each man. Proclaim him with your existence, dedicated entirely to the Kingdom of God and the salvation of the world. Proclaim him with faithfulness, with no compromises, the same faithfulness that recently led to martyrdom some of your brothers and sisters in several parts of the world."*

I'd like to recall another witness, that of **Brother Roger Schulz**. In his last letter from Taizé which was not completed and which was a work of art on love, he writes the following:

*"What does it mean to love? Does it mean sharing the pain of the mistreated and abused? Yes. That's it. Is it maybe an infinite kindness of heart? Does it mean forgetting oneself for others in a disinterested way? Yes that is certainly right. Yet still, what does it mean to love? To love means to forgive. It means living through reconciliation and reconciliation is always a new spring for the soul."*

***This letter is also a gift to Europe. It is a credible witness that consecrated life is either a place of love for the others, especially for the poor and the marginalised or it is nothing at all. There is nothing that is mile of the road. It is either one thing or the other.***

**Jean Vanier** said: "I know someone who, coming back from Calcutta, said that he would never go back to that country because he had seen so much poverty. He had

seen so many people die on the streets. **Mother Teresa** went to the same places. She saw. She was moved to compassion with Jesus and she said, "I have seen so many people die on the streets. I've seen so much pain and suffering. I'm staying", Jean Vanier and Mother Teresa, a son and a daughter of Europe, "I'm staying".

It should be the answer of every consecrated man and woman. I'm staying in this place of difficulty. I'm staying wherever there is a need of my unconditional love.

I'm staying to bear witness to the love of God to the very end, in Albania, in Italy, in Belarus, in Switzerland...

I'm staying in the Congregation for Consecrated Life. This is the frontier that God has entrusted to me today.

This is the answer of many consecrated men and women, many volunteers, ordinary people, simple and brave, who are not trying to get any discounts in life, who are not trying to find the easy way out even when life is harder because of the lack of understanding of men and women and even the silence of God and we know full well that there are many moments when God does not speak to us. **So it is important to stay out there in the front line, out of love.**

## **The question of peace**

In addressing Europe John Paul II wrote:

*"On the way to serving man all Europeans must indefatigably commit themselves to the cause of peace. If we consider the century that is behind us, the old continent twice has dragged the whole world into the tragedy and desolation of war. Today it is beginning to learn the needs of reconciliation and understanding between peoples, the new bridges built between European nations are still unstable and not very safe. The conflict in the Balkans... revealed the danger of exacerbated nationalism and the need to open up new prospects of acceptance and exchange but also of reconciliation among peoples, individuals and European nations."*

**Yes the only way to reach lasting peace is to rebuild relations between men and women to go back to make sure that they encounter one another and accept one another and choosing to welcome each other.**

In this era of ours where much conflict still tears our European continent too many relations are distorted and peace is too frail and unsure. It is in this time of ours that the Pope is asking all Christians, but especially we consecrated men and women, to be the builders of peace, sentinels that proclaim peace with the witness of life.

*"This world of ours, doesn't it need joyful testimonies and prophets of the benevolent power of God's love? Doesn't it need men and women who, with their life and action are capable of sowing seeds of peace and fraternity?"*, Vita Consecrata 108.

**We are therefore called to be watchful sentries, dreamers and prophets according to the affirmation of Father David Turoldo: "Oh Lord, send forth prophets, men and women who are sure of God, who trust him".** It's a lovely definition of the prophet.

The sentries do not fear the night. Instead they have the courage to willingly immerse themselves in the night

and to say, the night is night, but their soul is completely striving and aiming for the day.

**They have the courage to remain on the train of history with love. I remain; I am going to continue to travel on this train of our difficult and complex history.**

Out of experience we know that out of this night, there is a strong risk of cultivating feelings of vengeance, of closing oneself off in one's privacy even for us Christians who are the sons and daughters of the God of Life, brothers and sisters of the risen Christ. Not only that but immersed in the darkness of the night we are tempted to escape and to get off the train of history. I have just quoted from Jean Vanier regarding Teresa of Calcutta. It is an invitation to remain aboard the train of **history though knowing that peace is the fruit of struggle, of sleepless nights, of daily research, and responsibility.**

It is not pacifism. It is a peace that disturbs life. **After all, the crucifix is always disturbing to us and we know full well for we have chosen to espouse it. The Cross is not an optional.**

I don't know what you think about that and I don't know how you relate to the Lord who you have married. I know that he never leaves me in peace. He never says to me "Good for you. You've made it to the top." He never tells me that and he probably does the same with you. Therefore those who are ashamed of the Cross of Christ are not credible. They do not bring the evangelical peace. Those who have human respect, those who are ashamed of their own faith, are not bearers of evangelical peace. We made a choice, the choice to follow the crucified and risen Christ, the Christ who was rejected by his followers then and today.

Charles de Foucauld wrote:

"The Lord establishes a very accessible price for our salvation. That is not to be ashamed of the things that he was not ashamed of: the company of the poor, the marginalised, and the sinners. Not to be ashamed of his teachings, the truths of his religion, not to blush when confronted with his bride, the Holy Church. We must not be ashamed to adopt this style of life. We must not blush if we live out his counsels and commandments which are in sharp contradiction to the ideas of the world. Only one thing should lead us to be ashamed, not loving him enough..."

**As consecrated men and women, however we must not forget that peace is first and foremost a gift of the Lord and it must be asked for, sought and carried out and fulfilled in his name and with his power.** This we are taught by many martyrs, men and women who gave their lives for peace and in witness to the Gospel and this even in recent years.

**Peace is therefore, first and foremost a gift of God, but it is also our commitment and I wish to mention three aspects of this.**

First to build peace we need **ecology of the mind.**

By that I mean an intellectual honesty that leads us to call things by their name: to call evil what is evil and good what is good without being afraid. This makes us bold in seeking the truth and denouncing injustice and the violation of the rights of the weakest which induces

us to be consistent people, people who really are consistent with their life, men and women with a kind gaze, who are not short-sighted, who are not resigned and who are not incapable of reading history. They must have a kind gaze, watchful in deciphering the plan of God in events and in people.

Then there is **ecology of the heart** which is the ability not to take the side of the powerful, which is difficult, to not close your eyes when you see injustice and to cultivate in our life, love, peace, compassion and forgiveness.

I would like to take a moment to say a few things about forgiveness.

I'd like to use an example:

"Roberto was exiled from Uruguay and he came to live in our community for a few months. This was in '75-'76. He was 28 and he is someone who had been marked both in body and mind by the torture that had been inflicted on him during the five years that he had been in prison. He worked at the University library. He had never been involved in politics. He was arrested by chance and by a mistake and he went through hell. Roberto told us that in the common cells the prisoners would talk about the future of their country. They would talk about what they could do and they talked about the type of torture they would inflict on those who were torturing them. They talked about hard labour, mutilation, killing them, sending them off in exile. Alone Roberto said I won't do anything like that to them. I never want to be anything like them. I want to be a man."

***Forgiveness, therefore, is the path that can lead us to be true men and women,*** without the need for any other adjectives, according to what Mgr. Tonino Bello said, "Men and women without the need of any adjectives", to try to overcome the gap that has been established between Cain and Abel. Cain did not feel that he could be responsible for his brother after having killed him. Abel is invited by God to become responsible for Cain through forgiveness.

I think this is something which we all know is difficult to do but which is the road that leads us to peace.

Finally there is **the ecology of life** which helps us to be capable of being satisfied with what "is necessary", so that too many will not die of hunger particularly if they are children or the elderly, or immigrants or refugees, if they are persons who have lost their jobs. Ecology of life that give us the courage not to waste, but rather to share those material things which we have, to share our thoughts, to share our joy, to share our affection! We are all brothers and sisters who are responsible for one another.

***We must not share only our things with others, or waste things, but rather we are called to share everything, our affections, our love, our experience, our thoughts, our relationships.***

This path is not an easy one to follow, of course, and we know this so well. You have to struggle; you have to keep trying, trying, and trying again. Even if we fall, we must rise and continue our journey and we have to have the courage to continue.

I just read some notes by David Maria Turolto:  
*"Real fast is that which brings you to meet the God of Love through the brothers who have been gained by our charity, it is that which allows you to experience the Providence of God through the poor whom we help. One cannot conceive a faith which would not be incarnate in the sharing of bread, of love with the starving, in the putting of one's home to the disposal of the homeless. Hence, if you are looking for a certainty to your piety, share your bread, open your home. Then you will be blessed by God".*

In Vita Consecrata, John Paul II says courageously:  
*"It is the time of a new «imagination of charity» which would show itself not only through efficient assistance, but also in the ability to be close to and to show solidarity with the suffering, so that the act of assistance is experienced not as humiliating alms, but as a fraternal sharing ».*

It is an **imagination of charity** which leads us to give «high quality» (a *doc*-quality) to our service so that it be a sign which gives, questions, worries and yet sends "further" on to something more important.

Obviously this path is not an easy one and cannot be covered alone. Peace is an edifice which we must build "together", with the Lord, with effort and dedication, in respect and dialogue first, **because peace is a gift from the Lord**, because peace is an imposing yet fragile edifice, which is constantly subject to the ravages of ignorance, injustice, presumption and idleness.

An Italian writer, Susanna Tamaro in a book entitled: "More fire and more wind", wrote the following:  
*"The inner path is one that is similar to the type of things one had to do in the past to light a fire. You have to beat one stone against the other tirelessly until that spark finally comes. To be born, a fire needs wood but if it is going to spread then it has to wait for wind. So we need to look for the fire in our life and then wait for the wind. Without fire and wind days are not very different from a mediocre type of imprisonment."*

In other words, we must always be ready to start once again, but with the strength of the Spirit and with the Faith that the Lord will help us, that the Lord is our strength and that he guides us.

## Conclusion

As I conclude I would like to refer to an experience that I had with some of the sisters who are here, last November in Poland. I was participating in a meeting with UISG and the title of that meeting was:

**"Wounds and Sources of Living Life", so what we are talking about here in other words is problems, difficulties, frontier situations, and the commitment of consecrated persons to be present and to offer compassion and support."**

In the homily of the Eucharistic celebration which was held in Czestochowa, in front of the Dark Madonna. In the comment of the readings of that day, the hymn of Charity of St. Paul and the Beatitudes, the celebrant stated:

"It is love and love alone that transforms wounds, tears, betrayal and other difficulties into a blessing".

It is love that transforms wounds into a blessing. It is only love that believes in everything, hopes in everything and gives us the strength to say:

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
Blessed are the persecuted,  
Blessed are those who cry"*

**It is love that gives us the strength to say this, not with words alone, but through our lives...**

So, dear brothers and sisters, in our Europe we want to spend our whole lives in courage and joy to generate this type of beatitude, peace, reconciliation, in a word, a world of marginalisation, at the heart of violence where women are abused and sold, children are violated and abandoned, where corruption, injustice and vendetta reigns, where there is a lack of jobs, homes, food love.

**We want to give this same love without any limitations, this love that can heal wounds and dry tears.**

**To be credible heralds of the peace of Christ, we need the wind of the Holy Spirit.**

We need the Holy Spirit to make the fire burn up. We ask Him to teach us that faithfulness to our roots and to the future of history becomes fertile and creative in the silence of worship faced with the infinite Transcendence of God.

In Czestochowa, contemplating the icon of the Black Madonna, the Queen of Poland, I saw with my own eyes that Mary is a queen, whose face as well as her soul has been wounded by the evil of a soldier, but also because of the sad and painful history of the people of Poland.

But at the same time she is a victorious queen covered in precious stones that are a gift of love and gratitude of her sons and daughters.

The wounds that have been healed by the faith and the love of the people of Poland, and by the many pilgrims throughout the world that becomes grace, joy and beauty. The tears become sources of life.

**This happens in Czestochowa and this happens everywhere when we know how to cry with our brothers and sisters, who suffer, and we know how to share their pain and we know how to be as Mary was, at the side of the innumerable crosses of mankind.**

Saint John of the Cross said something beautiful about this, when he commented on the Gospel that was read for the feast of Saint Mary Magdalena:

*"Someone who does not know  
how to cry for love  
has lost a great part of their own beauty.  
If your soul has reached this point,  
**you** need to re-conquer this lost beauty,  
to purify yourself in tears,  
**you** can become once again  
a beautiful creature of God."*

**Mary cries with us and teaches us to cry over the innumerable miseries of the world and gives us the gift of compassion that we may be what can heal so many tears.**

She is our mistress in faith, hope and love, the mistress of faith that transforms the Cross into Resurrection and the many tears into joy. **She told us this on Calvary and**

**she tells us this today so that our lives may always be a blessing.**

<sup>1</sup> In their great majority, the Europeans are Christians (526 million: 285 million Catholics, 158 million Orthodox, 77 million Protestants, 26 million Anglicans; 11 million others), but the presence of other religions becomes increasingly significant. In some countries there is traditionally a Muslim majority (Turkey, Albania, Bosnia), but a new phenomenon is the still more important presence of Muslims in the Western countries in connection with the phenomenon of migration and refugees. Statistics indicate some 34 million Muslims in Europe. Judaism which belongs to the roots of Europe is also important (2 and a half million). Besides, reference is made to a comeback of the sacred in esoteric, magic, Gnostic and mythical expressions and diffuse forms of new paganism or of philosophical movements which settle themselves nearly like religious communities and claim their rights.

<sup>2</sup> We are celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vita Consecrata, and we have prepared a monographic issue of our magazine, Sequela Christi which is the magazine of the Dicastery. It has a new title. It used to be called SCRIS when the Dicastery was called Sacred Congregation for Religious. Now the dicastery has changed its name. The Sacred has gone and we are simply a Congregation. This publication will come out this week on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vita Consecrata and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Perfectae Caritatis.

<sup>3</sup> My indications are of a pastoral character. In order to examine the problem from a strictly sociological point of view, I suggest reading the book by Renzo Gubert and Gabriele Pollini, *Values facing each other: Italy and Europe*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2006. The authors take among others the case of religion into account.

<sup>4</sup>VITALI D., *If peace is a woman. A provocation based on the «holy negotiator»*, Bologna, EDB 2005, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Globalisation is a de facto reality, an increasing phenomenon, a process of planetary exchange which links countries, economies, markets, religions, cultures, values. It is a process which could improve the living conditions of all but yet generates the concentration of power in the hands of a few (making the rich richer and the poor even poorer<sup>1</sup>), favours cultural homology (wipes out regional characteristics and penalizes diversities), creates monopoly within communication networks (the peoples' power is increasingly in the hands of the holders of the communication means), provokes the loss of personal and cultural identities. For the poorer countries, the negative influence is particularly cumbersome: exploitation of peoples, domination by multinationals, financial speculation, economic protectionism, crises and fragility of democracies, violation of the environment, bribery, wasting of resources, rejection of minorities ... And I could go on giving the exposure of means by which millions of men and women trampled in their dignity and rights are humiliated.

### **Sister Enrica Rosanna fma**

Born on 3 July 1938 in Busto Arsizio, Varese, in **Italy**. First Profession as **Daughter of Mary help of Christians** in 1964.

All along the 40 years of her Religious Life she was actively involved in her congregation.

Until 31 August 1998 she was President of the University Institute annexed to her community.

1966 Diploma in Religious Sciences at the International Institute of Pedagogy and Religious Sciences in Turin.

1970 Licentiate in Social Sciences and 1973 research Doctorate in Social Sciences at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

1970-1972 Guest professor at the Pontifical Faculty of Sciences of Education run by her Congregation Turin

From 1973 till today professor whether ordinary, extraordinary or guest of «Sociology of religion» or of «Research in religion at the service of pastoral ministry» in various faculties in Rome: the Theology Faculty of the Pontifical Salesian University, the Pontifical Faculty of Science of Education «Auxilium», the Faculty of the Science of Education of the Pontifical Salesian University

**1982-2005**, with interruptions, professor of «Sociology of Consecrated Life» at the Institute «Claretianum» (Pontifical University of the Lateran) and also at «Auxilium»

Member of various commissions of the Italian Bishops' Conference, she has been invited by Pope John Paul II to attend **several Vatican synods**, one of which on the bishop's office in 2001, as an auditor.

**2004**: on April 24, Sr. Enrica Rosanna has been **appointed under-secretary for the Congregation of the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, CIVCSVA**.

It is the first time that a woman has such a high function within the Church government. It is the first time in the history of the Church that a woman is under-secretary with a Vatican Congregation, with jurisdictional powers

**Publications**: numerous articles in reviews and essays in books and dictionaries.

**Books** - ex.: *Pathways of formation for a prophecy of feminine Religious Life*, Rome, LAS 1996 (in coll. with Pina Del Core)

*Religious Life at the threshold of the year 2000. Towards which models of formation?* Rome, LAS 1997 (in coll. with Pina Del Core)

*Women and humanisation of culture at the threshold of the third millennium. The Path of Education*, Rome, LAS 1998 (in coll. with Piera Cavaglià, Hiang-Chu Ausilia Chang, Marcella Farina).