

Passion for Christ, passion for humanity



Br. Jean-Claude Lavigne op

What contribution does our life in community make to Europe?

The common life as school for each one and for Europe

What does the common life of men and women religious offer to Europe?

Not much. Let's be clear.

Like our European countries, our communities are riddled with the difficulties that all the groups and institutions in Europe have: difficulties of comprehension, inter-generation and transmission (even more as the youth are rare and are not like us from the point of view of ways of living and doing), conflicts of power and rivalries... They are also riddled with the difficulties that all Europeans meet: intercultural problems, problems of individualism, lack of solidarity, fear of the unknown... We are like everyone else and in this world, not only indifferent spectators or simple evaluators.

To paraphrase Elijah, we are not "better" than our peers and we do not have much to offer in the great project that is the construction of Europe and which, we have to say, is not really waiting for us ...except...that we are conscious of our limits and that we aspire to overcome them, that we have the conviction that we must go further in fraternity and that our present situation is neither "just" nor good. It is easy and realistic but this is not what we committed ourselves to when we made profession to be religious and to follow Christ. We sense that we cannot resign ourselves in the name of realism to what we are living, Religious Life being a permanent way of conversion.

Religious Life is always subject to this tension to move towards more fraternity, this is the work of the Holy Spirit but he requires on our part an ever greater availability to his work so as to become passionate about God and passionate human beings. What we can then offer is this concern to move forward and not be content with what is now, concern to go further than the simple polite non-aggression between us and to have the imperious target of fraternity, beyond our religious brothers and sisters, so as to be open to the whole of humanity, beginning with

our neighbours. This is what the texts of the Magisterium brought us, in particular the declaration on the fraternal life in community "*congregavit nos*" of 1994 or "*Vita Consecrata*" of 1996 (N° 46) alerting us to the impasse of communitarianism which does away with the distance between individual and community and imposes a logic of identity confinement.

Our common life, even through its limits, brings to light several possible stages in the relationships between us, stages that dovetail and complete each other or which more specifically characterize one or other of our religious families, for differences exist between us linked to our founding traditions; stages which are all of great value and of which none can be under estimated. Let us look at five:

- **The stage of active non-aggression** which makes the RL a school of peace. This stage is indubitably progress with regard to the reign of violence in our society or the frantic concurrence resulting from the new liberal globalization, progress also with regard to the past history of wars between the nations of Europe or within themselves. It is never really assured even in the religious life (in RL violence and concurrence can have numerous forms of disguise) but our rules, our rituals, our Scriptures urge us towards peace. Does not the Risen Lord meet us by proposing peace? Is not peace, the "Shalom God" proposes through Isaiah and the Apocalypse? This non-aggression is to be learned and lived out in the daily life of our differences; these latter are not abolished or to be abolished but to be transformed: differences of age, characters, and cultures (RL is more and more internationalized). Daily life is also marked by relationships with power (which cause tension with the vow of obedience) and inevitable rivalries; all these realities often constitute the reality of our community lives but also call for transcendence. Is it not here that we are Europe? And this is already a great victory with regard to the days gone by of wars, violence, and a more or less policed scorn, victory which is the origin of the project of the

EU. And this is not done without pain...and remains fragile (intolerant extremist groups, nationalist or religious); it is a question then of becoming conscious of this positive evolution, of this chance not to sombre in the easy and reducing euro pessimism and at the same time remember the ever present risk of a return to the violence (the memory of the terrible, writes Fr. Rancoeur, is absolutely indispensable). In Christian language, the challenge is to recognize, in this peace which is sought and won little by little, in our communities and in our countries, a work of the Spirit and give thanks for this in our life of prayer and our apostolic commitment, Lk 1. 78-79: canticle of Zachariah, Jesus rising sun come to lead us in the way of peace.

- **The stage of “convivance”** (a neologism constructed like that of governance) which makes of the RL a school of “being together”. The Trinitarian dynamic is then at the heart of our reflection. In the common life, we can not only be non-aggressive but we can rejoice together and be together. This is what the word “convivance” sends us to. To find it agreeable (this does not mean easy and irenic) to live together and to find in this being together a “plus” in life, a stimulation even if we are not generally chosen. Are not our communities a place of support, of help, as much material, corporal when we get old, as cultural and spiritual (and no dimension is to be scorned), which allow each one to be less alone and so to be open to life in a larger more spiritual way. At least this is the challenge to be taken up and we must recognize the pleasure of the common life, pleasure which is not closed in on itself but points to something of hope. Is it not in an analogical way what Europe expects from the great market, common rules for exchange and production, from the putting in common of means and strategies and which is lived in a more intense manner by the members of the EU. Have we not made progress in this “convivance” and in the best level of life since we have made the European Union or developed good neighbour relationships with the neighbouring countries of the EU, while being conscious that this is sometimes done in pain (example the common agricultural policy) with the risk of marginalizing those who are not in the EU...There, too, we must rejoice and know how to give thanks for these advances, but also dare to show our happiness in being religious by attesting that the putting in common is the greater source of the riches than those that procure rivalries and hope that this will be contagious.
- The third stage is that of **cosmopolitanism** (in the sense of E. Kant) which makes of the RL a school of openness (in the way of the Pentecostal adventure of acts 2). It consists in being open to the existence of the other without losing one’s own identity. It is the openness out with our own evidence, or own convictions, beyond the “sameness” (Ricoeur). A more

difficult stage than the precedent ones and that our communities often have more difficulty in putting into practice, being alas sometimes only groups of isolates, of individuals, blocking the originality of each one in a fortress of solitude. This cosmopolitanism, chance of the common life, must already be conceived within the same national culture between different generations (and between generational cultures) but it is also lived in our communities where the brothers and sisters are of different nationalities, which is more and more frequent. This cosmopolitanism invites us to take an interest in what the other is living, in what he brings as original - experiences and questions. This attitude opens the intelligence and each of the members of the community. This stage is not yet very generalized in Europe. Most of the citizens, in Europe, still remain enclosed within their universe while the discovery of the other could, not make them become like the others, but become rich from the meeting with the other. This is the plea of Ulrich Beck (cf. his book “the European Empire”) which would make us come together, in the diversity of our histories, beneficiaries of the other and not losers, on condition that we do not remain enclosed in our fearful nationalisms. The fear of the other - the stranger, hereditary enemy of a short while ago, is certainly not easy to transform into friendship but the interest (cultural and economic) in knowing him, welcoming him in his difference is fruitful. It is the Pentecostal adventure (Ac. 2) of which we can in our communities, by our lived experience and the solutions that we have imagined in order to get over our difficulties (in the inter-generation or our internationalization for example), witness to the vitality thus contributing to make it desired.

- The fourth stage is that of **hospitality** with what it suggests as reciprocal relationships, as displacement, as cost also and which makes of the RL a school of welcome. Hospitality leads to making the other enter more deeply into our intimacy: image of Christ: rich with his experience (his weakness included), the other, real in his complexity and his originality often disturbs. Hospitality is one of our great traditions: it procures the comfort, the care, the recognition of the other and a concern for him. Thus this hospitality opens to the struggle against evil by making of the other our neighbour (Jabès). Our religious communities are more or less hospitable to the stranger, according to their proper styles, but we have in common the practise of hospitality at least to the brothers and sisters, to each other, opening the specificity and the originality of each one to that of the other. Europe is facing this challenge with great difficulty. What interest, what welcome do the Europeans manifest for another European, his culture, for his traditions? Not to mention the difficulty in welcoming in our economies, in our towns and our governmental institutions the national from another

country of Europe. Nor even the mutual help to take up the economic challenges of globalization. Hospitality calls for the transcending of the distrust now, it seems that many in Europe have not yet given up this chilly attitude, even at the heart of the EU (which explains in part the rejection of the Treaty in France and the Netherlands and which the new project of a Treaty for 2009 is trying to reverse). Our attempts at hospitality, even modest, in the RL seem to show that this is possible, that this is reproducible and broadening. Our modest practices can then make us think and perhaps will give us the taste for going further in openness to the other.

- The last stage is that of **fraternity** (J. Ratzinger, *Brothers in Christ*, Le Cerf, 1962). This is the ideal we are seeking to live in our communities be it according to the model of the first Christian communities (AC) be it that of the disciples around Jesus... Not only for the pleasure, efficiency or intellectual openness, but to follow Christ as closely as possible and signify the new economy introduced by the Resurrection; that which pushed the Christians to live as brothers and abandon the each one for self logic and rivalry (even if it was difficult: Peter, Paul and John) and enter into confidence (the problems of Ananias and Sapphires). Fraternity that then makes of the RL a school of communion as is said in "Starting afresh from Christ" (Nº 28) and which is built on the putting in common of our weaknesses and our hopes more than on the affirmations and the strong points. Fraternity which is spread out fundamentally on the pardon received from Christ and multiplied between us, pardon, the true cement of the common life beyond the sympathies and connivances. Fraternity is demanding and never attained – hope in clear obscurity as C. Chalier wrote ⁽¹⁾ – but it is the horizon the religious life targets. Europe seems a long way from this horizon. Reconciliations remain to be done and mutual recognitions have to be manifested. Each of the peoples which make up Europe must be recognized in their history and culture (recognized does not mean that it be without discussion or calling into question) and to recognize the value of the others, and this also concerns each European personally. Confidence is not yet truly at the meeting place in Europe and rivalry which urges towards the minimization of the community – and even the inter governmental – is often stronger than the wish to live together so as to face the future.

These passages towards a more fraternal relationship to which the religious life and its institutions tend and at which sometimes they arrive, design a strong European project; a project that is the responsibility of the politicians and evidently not to the small minority of

religious. It will serve nothing to be givers of lessons: no one will listen to them in the secular universe which is Europe and it will even have a negative impact; how then can we contribute to the advancement? Through these five stages we have already underlined, the necessity of giving thanks for what has already been realised in the Europe of 2008 and this "thanksgiving" must encourage us ourselves to better live these dimensions of peace and "convivance".

Our common life – and the institutions that permit it – can also make us think that it is possible to go further in the cosmopolitanism, hospitality and fraternity. May this be possible and may it cause happiness, may it contribute to the accomplishment of our humanity. It is in this that the RL can be a sign and a means of communion, sacrament of communion, that it can go beyond the denouncing function of the prophet who names what is wrong so as to incarnate, even modestly, the announcing function of this prophetic posture that the religious life passes on, function that shows that another way of living is possible and fruitful for each and all.

But so that our prophesying is plenary, after the denunciation which is easy and the annunciation which takes over from the "come and see", we must put into practice the third function of the prophet: the visitation, for the true prophet cannot be content to denounce and announce; God pushes him beyond.

This third function requires us to go to meet our contemporaries and to put ourselves at their service. Not in making proselytes for ourselves to the European idea, this is not our mission, nor only by the silent witness for our fellow citizens do not really know how to decipher this witness (de-Christianization and secularization are the causes). We must give an account to those by whom we accept to be met, by word and act, of what we live and this can be inspiring for those who are seeking a good and just life (as Fr. Ricoeur writes). This visitation which renews our apostolic life can mobilize our works, our networks, our European communities and our pastoral know-how; this leads us to work with others at the art of becoming European by offering the palette of our already existing European values, our hope of fraternal communion and our modest experience in this domain.

In this perspective, we are not exterior to a world that we would like only to transform; we are on the road with it, transforming ourselves with it but through a fruitful distancing that the common life institutes; fruitful distance of which the Act of the Apostles gives the enthusiastic recital.

¹ Catherine Chalier, "The Fraternity", Buchet-Chastel, 2003

Questions:

- **How do you receive these propositions in order to characterise the forms and stages of the community life?**
- **How can we be communitarian actors of peace in and for Europe? What obstacles and chances? How can we be actors of fraternity?**

The common life as attitudes for each one and for Europe

If fraternity is the horizon targeted by the Religious Life, the common life also helps each one of the religious to advance by giving them the means to follow Christ (means that are the rules, the traditions, the vows and the institutional procedures which organize the power...but also the other members of the community) and to pass with Him from death to life. Alas sometimes wounds can be caused by our difficulties in living evangelically together. But the aim of the religious life is completely opposed to this and is a plea for a more intense life. This aim, in the measure in which it highlights a certain number of propositions, can be our contribution to the construction of Europe. On one condition: that we are inserted into the spaces of dialogue and discussion on the future of Europe which results in two attitudes:

- *That we know how to give an account not only of the hope that inhabits us but of what we are seeking to live in daily life.*
- *And a great desire for debate haunts us, a desire that is inseparable to that of listening and not overwhelming the other by our arguments.*

Is this not the apostolicity of our religious life (whatever canonical form it has)?

Our preaching, our works, our ways of being present to the world in particular to the most fragile, as well as the fact of inviting men and women to join our communities, are ways of proposing values and practices to Europe but our life together, the common and fraternal life, offers by itself tracks for the European building site, beyond our personal qualities and limits. We are, in this Europe which is searching for itself, among other Europeans and what we are living is already a way of building Europe. Our existence in community, while each one in Europe lives for himself and his limited group, is already an interrogation that can invite to reflection on the possible and desirable lifestyles.

I retain here five propositions which condition our religious life and which are also the fruits of it (and schools that result from it) but which also make of us European citizens animated with a certain ideal, one among the numerous ideals of Europeans; five propositions that can also be propositions for a new Europe, contributions to the debates – formal and informal – through which Europe is being built and perhaps a European being. By proposition, it must be understood not only the values but the putting into practise of them, ways of being, not attitudes gained, but the incessant research so as to make of them realities and daily practices. The

common life is less a way of doing than an organization in order to become.

- ***The concern about the link:*** our religious lives rest on the free choice of solidarity between us and on the sharing of what we have and what we are: putting in common on the financial, cultural, and spiritual level...putting in common of our time and our centres of interests, our doubts, and our relations. Never easy putting in common, for our characters are different, our capacity to expose ourselves to others always insufficient, our dialogues rarely easy and confidence never definitively attained. All this is to be built and rebuilt, patiently; it is what pushes our communities to seek unity. Our religious lives are also the places where we try to live out the welcome of our weaknesses, our handicaps, and our limits our illnesses and our advanced age... with, of course the limits linked to our human and technological means. This link allows us also to hear in depth the cries of the excluded, the non-integrated (migrants, foreigners), the rejected, those without links, and the humiliated and to make ourselves close and in solidarity with them (this is where our vow of poverty leads us) for the human link is a possibility for the wounded to rebuild their humanity. This concern we have about the link between us and with those who do not have the necessary social connections to succeed can build, in its dynamic, a paradigm of the good and just life in Europe and a provocation for our communities to be weavers of links beyond national frontiers, linking East and West but also countries of the North and the South.

The European Union has a certain concern for this link: exchanges between groups (youth, professionals) of different nations, regional politics to diminish the economic gaps, the political structures, cooperation with developing countries...but the promotion of the daily social link, the social solidarity, the struggle against the poverties and social exclusions remain the responsibility of each state. Social Europe is still far off and it invests little in the promotion of the link, a nevertheless central element in the common project of Europe. At the level of Europe in its ensemble, the mechanisms of solidarity are few. There is here a field of action and protest that the religious life calls us to invest in: migration, discrimination, rights of people...by calling for political changes – which are a matter of justice and in putting into practice already in our communities these systems of weaving and

welcome of the “disconnected” of modernity, these links that build the friendship (another word for saying charity), which makes life more worthy and agreeable for everyone.

- **The seeking for truth:** the common life is above all verification and authentication of our desires to live in following Christ, way beyond our little daily lies and our “cinemas” or our meanness. The common life, in this perspective, is a walk in the following of Him who says to us “I am the way, the truth and the life”, the three dimensions are tied in one single dynamic in our personal and community lives, truth which makes us free in order to ratify each day the call that reaches us. We do not last in community if our discourses are too rarely conformed to our acts, if we remain in illusion about ourselves, if we remain in pious dreams, while our acts are far from our discourses or our dreams. Life together allows for the casting aside of appearances (or at least would permit it if fear did not intervene and spoil everything). Our common life helps us to enter into truth on the way of conversion that remains to be travelled, way always to be taken up again and for which others are essential, indispensable aides. This life together postulates too that each one seeks to be true before others, and before themselves so as to be true before to God... this is not simple and demands patience and respect, the capacity to ask pardon and to feel welcomed with kindness.

To propose the truth for the construction of a Europe that is just and good suggests that it is not necessary to lie so as to live. The truth rarely gets a good press in the political world; the true is not often politically correct. Now, there is absolutely no need for demagoguery so as to advance, for example by appealing to nationalistic reflexes, to the fear of migrants, to the spirit of revenge, to the ancestral enmities... Strength is to remark that this remains rarely present in governmental behaviour which remains very often in obscurity, lack of transparency, the rarely kept flattering promises. Now, the true sets free, to the difference of demagoguery and manipulation. Research for the truth opens the way to democratic debate which is research through the debating of the best, or of what is close to the good and to true reconciliation (for example through a common reading of a conflictual history).

In the same sense, the practise of the true invites, in the framework of the EU, to not use the Brussels Commission as a scapegoat to mask the refusal of political responsibilities. It suggests the practising as much as possible of democratic debate and not technocratic judgement which refuses the points of view of the citizens so as to advance the project of the EU.

The common life of religious can be a witness – verbo and exemplo – of the pertinence of a fraternal seeking for the truth so as to live a good life with and for the

other in just institutions (taking up once again Fr. Ricoeur).

- **Generosity** (the first of the virtues for Descartes: “passions of the soul, 1649, n° 153): the common life is a permanent call to lose something of one's ego to the profit of a greater presence to God and others, following Jesus who gave himself up even to death for humanity. It does not lead to the effacing of each one but suggests the renouncement of the closing in on oneself, the giving of what one has and is so that a space where God can come be freed. The common life is a proposition for a more and more radical letting go so as to let oneself be approached. To be generous is less to give than to let oneself be reached by the cries of others, near or far, God or the brothers and not to shy away (1 Jn) from their demands. The common life requires this attitude and must favour it for it is the source of a permanent transcendence towards the living God. Fear is no longer acceptable and egocentricity or calculation either. However the reality lived out in our communities on this level is not always a success. There are, here, conversions to be experienced as a matter of urgency.

The difficulties experienced in community in this domain are to be found on the scale of Europe and of its project. So that Europe becomes a fraternal continent, be it in the form of the EU, be it in other forms, it is necessary for each State to abandon a little sovereignty so as to find more of it again with the other European states and accede together to a more prosperous and happy space. By being associated with the others and in accepting the rules of the community game, each country accedes to new opportunities, to a greater influence in the community space, to a better life (this explains on the one hand, certain countries' desire to join the EU)... Now we are far from this situation and the fearful priority of each one for self remains the dominant attitude. This explains the constant enough tensions so as to closely defend national interests to the detriment often of the good of all and even to the detriment of that of each of the state definitively. Paradoxically generosity leads to the way of gain, gain for all.

The RL is there before a challenge as much for itself as for Europe: it must demonstrate by the happiness of its members and their spiritual advances (in the humanity of each one) that generosity and rejection of egoism are the ways of being efficient and pertinent.

- **The celebration:** the common life of religious is founded on and celebrated through the liturgy and our spiritual practices. It is common prayer to The One who gives life and response to His always primary call. The Religious Life is thus supported and revived by what is radically external to it (what one calls transcendence) and what it confesses as such. The common life of religious receives its being from another and not only from its members, even full of

good will, militant generosity and exquisite politeness. The RL says this beyond of itself and names it the source of its joy, of its hope and of its most essential being, evidently according to the modalities and discourses proper to the charisms of each congregation. It dares also to say that this beyond has a Name, that it compromised itself in the history of humanity and continues to do so and that the Other came to meet our humanity, personal and collective and that we can from now on taste his presence. We find the Eucharistic dimension of the common life again here.

Europeans are not unanimous in the naming of this transcendence, or in the need for a public nomination of the place that this transcendence has in their daily life (debate about the origin of the European values). For some, Man (and his rights) is enough, for others it will be the sense of history, for others a God and these last will be different one from another when it is a question of being precise about who this God is. We cannot however hold to the construction of Europe without recognizing in it a "soul" this is what J. Delors said in 1994 "if in ten years we have not succeeded in giving a soul, a spirituality to Europe, we will have lost the game" (repeated in 1999 in Strasburg cathedral).

This recognition of the "soul" of Europe passes necessarily by the plurality, the polymorph, the taking seriously of the diversity of points of view and of the systems of nomination of the transcendence. This taking seriously obliges us to enter into this concert and to dialogue. We cannot desert and have to risk a collective (thus stronger even if it is less media friendly) and not only individual word, word lived and spoken, so that the soul of Europe be radiant and source of fraternal behaviour. This word cannot be content to be only ethical (however indispensable) but it must target the proposition of a joyous hope to a continent which doubts itself and its future, something that has to do with the horizon of the sense of Ricoeur.

It is not a question of wanting to re enchant the world but of living fully a relationship with Christ and the brothers and of daring – in a manner respectful of others – to say something about this relationship, of celebrating it and of living it mystically in the sacraments. This will constitute an important proposition for the Europe we hope for.

- **The strength:** this attitude is, in a way, the synthesis of the four preceding ones. The life in community allows us to transcend our personal weaknesses a little: it offers us support, allows more assurance and gives more strength to each one (economic matters included) by the collective dimension, by the freely chosen "being together"; strength which allows us to qualify, beyond our limits and our characters, our evangelical message. Not by the strength of the powerful, nor the power of the "great ones of this

world" against the others, the less astute or the more fragile, but by those of whom St. Paul speaks regarding the folly of the cross and which benefits all. Strength (not blockage) that our communities offer more often when they care about the common good which is the good of each and all, which is more than the sum of the interests and individual sensibilities. This strength, different from power as St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us, won through the common life is of the order of tranquil, peaceful assurance that means we have no more need of violence and aggression to live (Happy the gentle, and not the weak).

It was on such logic that the idea of the European Union was constructed, inscribing in its heart the aim of European common good (through for example the Higher authority then the wanted commission out with the system of relation of political force) but this is often forgotten to the profit of national rivalries or the not always fruitful defence of sovereignty, which weaken the action of the member states (for example in diplomatic matters or helping developing countries; will the new treaty change these reactions?) and sterilize the dynamics. Protectionism, the struggles to draw profit from the others, not to be associated, do not make for the progression of Europe nor for the happiness of Europeans; they disqualify the European project as a concrete and pertinent alternative to "Americanized" globalization. Also, this strength is often an unhealthy seeking for power (in the discourses) by the incessant reminder of European performance compared with that of the USA or Japan.

For the whole of Europe, the common life of religious can attest that cooperation, mutualisation of our competence and our questions is an efficient strategy and thus usable; the logic of concurrence is not the only one possible. Rivalry rarely leads to the good of all and to a shared hope with regard to the future; it leads more surely to the death of the weak.

These five propositions do not describe a complete scenario; each and every one, according to their charisma, has to make an inventory of what our fraternal life can bring about. But the RL is not an archaic manner of existing; its ancient perfume can, by mixing itself with other Europeans, contribute to the making of the European space a place where the adventure of each and every one has taste, a space where our God himself gives himself to taste.

Questions:

- **How have you received these propositions?**
- **What is the most essential posture for taking up the challenges of Europe?**
- **What heritage can we share with our European brothers and sisters?**

The common life as service for each one and for Europe

During the two previous conferences we started from what the common life of religious could suggest for the construction of a happier and fairer Europe. The common life of religious was presented as a source of values; ways of being that could give ideas on the road Europe could borrow but also as a place of intercession and praise in order to support this possible orientation for Europe.

1. Reviews

On re-reading what has been produced in the group work and what has happened in the course of this assembly, I would like, in a first period, to send you back to what you have said.

The theme was the common life but it is difficult to separate it from the totality of existence that the religious life represents. Some have therefore underlined the importance of taking up the cultural challenges, for Europe is a mosaic of cultures. Others have reflected on the demand for spirituality which is present in the modernity and have insisted that religious do not hesitate to respond to this demand; which is completed by others who put the accent on the witness of the life of prayer. Finally others ask the question about a possible political prophetism in European society and in the Church.

If we re-centre on the common life which is the subject of our reflection, the groups said that the religious life could bring to Europe, as a service, some attitudes:

- be truthful in being concerned for the other
- be concerned about the social link
- present the strength of the weakness in a society that is too sure of itself
- give importance to the "letting go" which allows true freedom
- the central value of hospitality
- the place of the celebration and the seeking of a soul for Europe

The groups have made even more concrete proposals:

- Work to give better information on the religious life (and its heritage) and to reveal a better image (truer also) of what we are and what we live, how we can contribute to the European adventure.
- Work for the coming two years on "the soul of Europe"
- Mutually help each other in the organization and development of the conferences of religious especially with countries that have fewer resources for this.
- Seek to speak with a unified voice in Europe for we make more of an impact than we think and our propositions can contribute to the process of a more just and fraternal Europe.
- Everywhere in Europe be concerned to speak about our motivation, our aims by using the language of mercy and hope.

- Revitalize by actualizing fraternal correction, community and individual discernment.
- Learn to manage conflict in view of the common good.

2. Some convictions

Having worked with you all these days I would like to share three convictions which seem to be our common patrimony.

- Without practising the "Coué method", it seems to me that ***the religious life has something to propose to Europe***, not like the "new crusaders" but like European citizens moved by new ideas that are particular and susceptible to respond to the challenges that the European space has to confront. We have to bring these ideas through debate, reflection and a common process. We have to bring them, as citizens among the 488 million others but also as citizens having important networks and an ecclesial influence susceptible to having certain strength. Finally we have to bring these propositions concerning ways of being together and values through our pedagogy, our "witness" and also our works and our preaching (catechism, media...)

The things we bring can have an "influence" for Europe is a building site. J. Derrida said even that (Europe was a continuous process, not a state arrived at. This is because Europe is in movement (towards a wider EU, towards good neighbour relationships with non-member countries...) and that nothing is yet fixed, that our contributions are of importance. It is because we can contribute that Europe could perhaps be orientated towards other values than those which promote new liberal globalization. Our communities, our projects of "province of Europe" ...are laboratories for a certain type of Europe which can be an alternative to that which is happening.

We cannot absent ourselves from this site; this is the new horizon of our mission.

- In order to be in this dynamic we have a lot of ***work to do on our language***. We have to renew in depth, not so as to be in the fashion, but to be understood; our way of giving account of what we are and what we live. We have to make understood what the common life brings, not starting from ourselves but from our potential questioners. To say "an authentic life" where we "are signs", can no longer be understood for it is the other who can say we are authentic and if we are signs. We must at the same time decentre ourselves and start from concepts and new ways of thinking, of reflecting starting out from modernity. We must enter into this work of translation if we want, in European society, to fulfil our mission of bearers of the Good News and make the value of the Resurrection tasted. In this perspective, it seems fundamental to be not

visible but legible, under pain of being insignificant in contemporary culture.

- Visiting together the museum of Ypres we experienced ***the fragility of peace, of "creativity" of Europeans in destruction and violent*** (murderous gas) and also of the necessity of going beyond these situations for it is so for humanity. Reconciliation is urgent every day; the healing of memories is a task which is never ended. It requires going beyond cynicism and resignation and demands strength so as to hear the wounds, say one's own and walk a bit of the road together. Reconciliation demands we dare to listen to the pain of the other and put words on our own. Through this process, there is no question of forgetting what happened in our countries, in our communities, in our congregations and what the source of the ruptures was, but we must affirm the hope, the reconciliation that Christ came to offer us and which continues its work in us helping us to transcend ourselves. Europe needs a word on the possibility of peace and reconciliation; the religious can share their lived experience including their failures and their difficulties.

3. Some clarifications

Through the questions that were asked in the plenary assembly or debated in the group work, some points came up more frequently and give some aspects of the service that the religious life can offer in Europe.

+ The common life and self-centring

Self-centring describes in a non-moralizing way individualism. In a non-moralizing way for there is in this contemporary seeking something other than egoism. ***To starting from self-centring is to give its place to individual subjects' claims to autonomy*** while underlining the risks of going off the rails in an absolute subjectivity, or withdrawing into self and of indifference to others. Europe, like every other part of the world is caught up in this movement. Individualism becoming a value, suggests an autonomous capacity to define what makes sense for each one, the refusal of an external authority so as to say what is forbidden, the privileged place given to personal interiority. It also signifies the practise of do it yourself of convictions (which allow a mobile and flexible à la carte religiosity) and an infinite seeking for good. These are not "faults" or "errors" but a different world to that of the years immediately after the war which is expressing itself.

One of the corollaries of contemporary individualism is a certain indifference which takes on the appearance of tolerance. If each one is a fierce defender of his liberty (of thought and action), he must, so as not to let himself be interpolated by others, let the others think and do what they want. It is thus a great risk of juxtaposition of indifferent rather than tolerant individualities, in our communities as well. Life can seem easier, sweeter and policed, but where is the true fraternity that passes by a mutual interdependence and debate?

Now this way of thinking about the world in an egocentric way is one of the great problems of contemporary religious life. Religious life that leans on the common life is then become, even a little more anachronistic; it will be more difficult to accept, in this cultural universe of self-centring, as being a good way of living one's commitment to Christ than it was for older generations, where large families and the life of the team (scouts or other) were more frequently valued realities. The younger ones who enter congregations are marked by this culture of individualism and the older ones are also marked, even if they are not aware of it through their relationship with cheques accounts, obedience, to the individual decisions they take in great number or their resistance to a change of place of mission or apostolate.

The Europe of the egocentric is then a new challenge for the common life of the religious: either RL becomes a counter culture (a battlement against modernity) or it reconsiders its common life so as to be within this modernity and be a sign...or probably it has to live in this tension in a fruitful way by recalling the importance of generosity, of gift... and it is here that it renders service to the Europe that is being built.

+ Conflicts and reconciliation

This question came up several times during the assembly which felt thus that the common life finds its true "cement" here and that it can, on this point, give an account of what it lives for the project of the European union is wanting to be a project of reconciliation between belligerents and if that is successful for one part there remains still a lot of fear, distrust, stereotyping and fear. ***The religious who live in the countries that were once communist know also that memories are still not healed*** and that the suspicions, the rancour and "hates" are still present...not to mention the scornful "histories" we convey about those coming out of neighbouring countries.

The common life experiences difficulties in being together; it is not an "angelic" universe but a universe of conversion, of the exercise of mercy. Our communities live by pardon received and given as Christ suggested more than 77 times 7 times. So, we must mention the strength of pardon which not only makes possible the living together after the conflict but alerts to the sources of the never eliminated violence of human groups; pardon, never easy and yet essential.

Reconciliation also passes by oneself. To be reconciled with oneself invites one to leave scruples, unhealthy guilt behind. Each country of Europe must also leave its guilt behind.

For religious, pardon is inscribed in our lives by the reading of the Word of God, by the sacraments, by our openness to grace. How can we say to those who are our contemporaries that this is important and possible?

The management of conflicts is learned and procedures allow for the getting out of impasses. The techniques of

mediation can be a tool for our communities as they are for Europe.

Pardon demands the meeting and the word. The meeting that manifests the interest of one for the other and the non-sense of remaining enemies, which signifies respect for the dignity of the other, can only be realised if one accepts to listen, to allow oneself to be touched. The word, always risky and fragile, is the medium of this pardon. The common life cannot be built on unanimity, or on terror exercised by the strongest, or on weak consensus. It can only be built on the word exchanged, on dynamic and provisional agreements. It could be a service that might be rendered to Europe to recall these things - simple...and difficult.

+Identity and dialogue

The common life could be led astray into communalism, a chilly turning in on those who resemble us. There is a risk of identity confinements which would destroy personalities and call for hatred of the other, the different, and the stranger. The common life cannot signify an identity turning in on itself, it is an openness to the world, to others according to the specific charisms of each one of our congregations; this openness introducing the "third" at the heart of our lives, concern for the other, hospitality of the heart, of prayer or of the table...

The common life rests on the shared word, on exchange. It is through this, while giving its full place to silence, that the being together is built. The organization of the circulation of the word and the concern for this circulation are the major concerns of those responsible for our communities and congregations.

Europe needs this word circulating in order to be constituted beyond technocratic visions. It is when Europeans have spoken one with the other that they will be able to feel themselves embarked on the same adventure, in an unwritten history and they will feel European and interested in the future of their territory.

+The place of the countries of the South

These countries have been somewhat forgotten. Certainly there is urgency in Europe to live better the East-West relationship thanks to a better knowledge and fraternal debate, but ***Europe cannot be a fortress with regard to the South.*** It cannot be a fortress of prosperity before an Africa in poverty. The illegal migrants that die on the European coasts are there to remind us of it. Europe cannot be built without a responsibility to the developing countries (this was already in Schuman' European project addressed to Adenauer in 1951).

The monument to the dead in Ypres showed that the men of the South (Pakistan, India, and Africa) gave their lives for Europe. There is a duty of honour and memory for these gifts.

The religious life and its more and more international common life must be a reminder of this demand and can propose its ways of doing so that social relationships, enemy by globalization, make way for fraternal relationships between the different cultures. Another missionary life is en route (the South is coming to evangelize the North) and it must be deployed in a fruitful way. This challenge is a chance for the international congregations but it is also one of their missions for Europe.

+ A spirituality of the common life

Some theological elements (Trinity, community witnesses of the Resurrection...) have been used. What is important is also to develop a spirituality of the common life, ***an attitude of heart and of behaviour that animates desire for the common life.*** In a world that pushes towards "each one for self", the common life must be shown as a way of living that makes one happy and that the putting in common be recognized not as a simple obligation but as a true value for each one and for Europe. Also, we must not resign ourselves too easily to our mediocrities and our littleness in this life together. It is the Holy Spirit and our availability to his work that will help us advance in this perspective.

Father Jean Claude Lavigne

Born in France on May 24, 1951

Entered the Dominicans in October 1974 - Ordained a priest in July 1987

Has exercised numerous responsibilities in the Order (in Africa and in Europe): Father Master, prior, director general of Economy and Humanism, director of Espaces (Europe)...is actually socius of the prior provincial of the Province of France

Diploma from the Institute of Political Studies (Lyon), Doctor in Geography (EHESS, Paris 1) and Doctor in Economy (Lyon 2)

Has worked in India, Indonesia and different countries of Africa.

Author of numerous works on economy and in the more specifically spiritual domain:

"Le prochain lointain", Editions Cerf (Spanish translation with Santander)

"Habiter la terre", Editions de l'Atelier (Portuguese translation with Instituto Piaget)