**I Am Doing Something New**

Excerpts from the writings of Father Tomaz Hughes, SVD

Anyone who thinks that the Consecrated Religious Life situation is unprecedented is wrong. The ways in which it expresses itself, the concrete manifestations in many congregations are new, but the History of Salvation demonstrates that it was always through crises that God's plan advanced. In addition to Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, far from living up to his undeserved fame of being a pessimist, had this outlook in times of tribulation: “*For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the LORD—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope”* “ ( Jr: 29,11).

This truth is found not only in Old Testament cases, such as the Babylonian Exile, but also in the Gospels and in the experiences of the first communities. *"I'm creating something new and you don't perceive it?"* This could have been a question, not only in the time of the Exile, Jesus also asked it when he addressed his disciples. It was as if they were blinded by the ideology of Davidic messianism and, therefore, unable to understand the true messianism of Jesus (Mk 8:21; 8:33; Acts 1:6). The first communities had many problems in seeing the “new” that was emerging with the entrance of the Gentiles into the community. Just remember the conflict in the Jerusalem community, because of the treatment of Hellenistic widows. The need for an extraordinary Assembly, which we traditionally call the “Jerusalem Council”, welcomed the new, represented by the missionary experience of Barnabas and Paul, although it took time to be fully put into practice, as shown by the conflict in Antioch (Gal 2:22-14). What appeared to be a disaster for the nascent Church, such as the persecution unleashed in Jerusalem after Stephen's death, proved to be a blessing, as it led to evangelization in other regions and among other peoples ~~(~~ Acts 8: 4; 11, 19- 21). Even the acrimonious and painful separation of Barnabas and Paul, although regrettable in itself, resulted in the formation of two itinerant missionary teams, instead of one. Repeatedly, what looked like a disaster and ruin, proved to be renewal, revitalization and regeneration! But it demands a fresh look to move from lamentation and pessimism in order to discover what God was doing!

Jesus used to say, finishing his parables: *“whoever has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Mt 13:9). In view of the current situation of Consecrated Religious Life in Brazil (at present), the Spirit continues to bring about new life, but who knows, we need to remove the “veils” from our eyes and minds to see what is happening. In the words of a great American theologian for Religious Life, Sister Joan Chittister OSB states, “The purpose of Consecrated Religious Life is not survival, but prophetism”.

As Brother Timothy Radcliffe OP, former Minister General of the Dominicans, writes:

*“This is a time of crisis, and the Church is renewed by crises. Salvation History is a history of crises that lead to rebirth, from the Fall to the Last Supper. This time of Consecrated Religious Life crisis ultimately will be a blessing and lead~~s~~ us to renewal, perhaps in ways that we cannot imagine. But that will only happen if we are not obsessed with our survival. ”*

Perhaps today Jesus' cry to us is like that of Deutero-Isaiah so many centuries ago*: “See, I am doing a new thing: it is springing up now and you do not perceive it? Those who have eyes to see, let them see! ”*

*Questions for reflection:*

1. *What signs do you perceive of "something new" that God is bringing about in Consecrated Religious Life today?*
2. *Do you feel more optimistic or pessimistic in your Congregation/Community? Why, what are the causes?*
3. *What make it difficult for you to perceive the creative action of God in Consecrated Religious Life today?*