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Congo sister's talk offers new light in a time of darkness

by Thomas C. Fox



Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Liliane Sweko

Rome

When Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Liliane Sweko began her talk on the second day of a gathering of international women religious superiors here by sharing with them that in the past fifty years or so, many African women religious have been assassinated - 235 in 2003 - she had the audience's full attention.

She would keep their attention throughout her presentation, leaving the women seemingly burning with new fire to recommit themselves to the Christian work to which they had dedicated their lives.

Sweko is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She is the former novice directress in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and is a member of the Congregational Leadership Team of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Her talk was entitled, "Called to illuminate with Prophetic Light the world of darkness."

One woman said that following her May 8 presentation the gathered women "appeared eager to sign on" with new determination to take on the forces of injustice in the world."

In a question and answer period, one woman asked, "How do we make a collective statement of commitment before we leave this conference?"

The theme of this year's plenary assembly of the International Union of Superiors General, which has gathered 800 women to a hotel and its conference center here, is mysticism and prophecy. A number of women have said that during private table conversations they have been inspired to see the determination of women religious to be authentic voices for the Gospels is shared around the world by other women religious.

Several have spoken about the hope and renewed energy that has been growing in these sessions.

What follows is a printed version of Sweko's talk, which can also be found on the UISG website.

INTRODUCTION

As an African and a woman religious who worked for many years in Africa before being elected to the general leadership team of my congregation, I can only approach our theme from the starting point of the particular experiences through which religious life is growing and taking root in African soil. Well known for its poverty, under-development, endemic sicknesses and its wars and HIV/AIDS, is the African continent not in the process of making its mark within the noble Christian tradition of prophecy and mysticism? Yes, for the past fifty years or so, many African women religious have been assassinated (235 in 2003) along with their brothers and sisters, men religious, priests and laity. By the end of last year, the number of assassinated women religious greatly increased. We remember with great sorrow and many tears Sister Denise Kahambu Muhayirwa, a trappistine of the Monastery of Notre Dame de la Clarté-Dieu from MURHESA. Sister Denise Hahambu was about to celebrate her forty-fifth birthday on the Saturday of the week she was killed. The unbearable images of her broken body left in a pool of blood were transmitted throughout the world. In his pamphlet *They Lay In Wait For Us* published in 2003, Father Neno Contran, a Cambodian, assembles in an anthology the lives of all these women religious killed for their Christian faith and their religious presence and witness. In the Preface to this pamphlet, Sister Pétronille Kayiba, OP, writes:

If we examine the circumstances surrounding the death of these consecrated persons, we discover that they were not involved in activities that were particularly confrontational: their time and energy were devoted to teaching, medical assistance, development, evangelization. Unarmed, they were a threat to no one, were capable of extraordinary courage, and stood out from others solely by the gratuitousness of their love, sign of God's solidarity with people. Their story demonstrates that, perhaps more than in the past, risks are part and parcel of consecrated life and they arise unexpectedly. Wars, dictatorships and the exploitation of ethnic divisions have a way of making targets of important values and of those who embody them. It seems that attacks on convents and flights into the forest or into a more secure area in order to escape rape and looting are becoming commonplace occurrences much like the anonymous cases of suffering among ordinary people. (Sr. Pétronille Kayiba, OP, Preface, 5).

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As described, the situation of religious life in Africa highlights what is in fact a constant feature of consecrated life: whatever the particular situation in this or that continent, in this or that culture, risks are part of religious life and it is this very fact that enables us to bear witness to what the world, in the Johannine sense of the word, cannot comprehend. The following reflection on our theme will develop four points: shadow and light; mystics and prophets for our time; you are the light and salt of the earth;

actions designed to radiate light in the darkness.

SHADOW AND LIGHT

To realize that our world is a world where, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, the people walk in darkness, a world where men and women live in the shadows, one has only to pay attention to the daily reality of many countries and their people. However, should not our faith in the one who died and rose again transform our gaze so that we may discern the light, feeble as it may be, which continues to shine despite all the winds of the world which could extinguish it?

The description of the dark continent has become a classic one: its shadow should not, however, obscure its light, light announcing the rising of a more radiant and strong sun. The Lineamenta for the Second Special Assembly on Africa of the Bishops' Synod (June 27, 2006) describe the shadows of this continent in this way:

The widespread deterioration in the standard of living, insufficient means for educating the young, the lack of elementary health and social services with the resulting persistence of endemic diseases, the spread of the terrible scourge of AIDS, the heavy and often unbearable burden of the international debt, the horror of fratricidal wars fomented by unscrupulous arms trafficking, and the shameful, pitiable spectacle of refugees and displaced persons?. The infant mortality rate continues to grow. After more than ten years, the constant deterioration of revenues persists in some of the poorest countries of Africa. Access to potable water is still very difficult for many. Generally speaking, the great majority of African people live in a state of want for basic goods and services. Today's situation in Africa cannot fail to touch consciences. In these times, Africa more than ever is dependent on rich countries, and is more vulnerable than any other continent to their manoeuvring aimed at giving with one hand and taking back twofold with the other, and at keeping a strong hold on the development of the political, economic, social and even cultural life of African countries. In constructing the world, Africa is deliberately left out. (Lineamenta, Chapter 1).

The authors of these Lineamenta discern, however, glimmers of hope, sparks of light which can transform the shadows of the African continent into a beautiful sunlit day:

In many countries of Africa, only the Church functions well, enabling people to continue to live and hope in a better future. Furthermore, she provides necessary assistance, is a guarantor of living in harmony and contributes to finding ways and means to rebuild the State. However, she is also the privileged place where the subject of reconciliation and forgiveness can again begin to be treated. ? the advent of peace in some African countries; the burning desire for peace throughout the continent, especially in the Great Lakes region; growing opposition to corruption; a deep consciousness of the need to promote African women and the dignity of every human person; the involvement of the laity in "civil life" for the promotion and defence of "human rights"; and the ever-growing number of African politicians who are aware and determined to find African solutions to African problems.

Similarly, even though our world may still be disfigured by violence, all kinds of terrorism, wars and conflicts often enflamed by those in power and by multinationals seeking to profit from these situations in order to exploit the riches of poor countries and keep people dominated and oppressed, our Christian faith assures us that God is always present in this world. The surge in solidarity and fraternity, pretty well worldwide after catastrophes and natural disasters, and even after wars and armed conflicts, is amazing. Because it was so widely publicized, the global mobilization to assist the victims of the Tsunami or the earthquake in Haiti seems a good example. Thus, even when violence becomes inhuman, when everything would suggest that God has deserted us, when we declare that God is dead or bemoan God's absence and, as in the case of Eli, our eyesight begins to dim and we can no longer see clearly the wonders of God (1

Sam 3: 2-3), let us never forget that "the lamp of God has not yet gone out." Remember Etty Hillesum, the young Jewish girl who died in the concentration camps? She has wonderful words to say, words which should still be meditated upon and mined when the shadows, the darkness of our world, block all gaze upward toward the positive and all horizons of hope and of life. As an African and a Congolese, I feel all the humiliations, all the violence and rapes inflicted on my people's women, those many bodies demeaned, destroyed by the violence and wickedness of men.

Where do we find hope and the strength to continue to hope and live? I recall the words of Etty Hillesum, sisterly words, as a source of courage and faith: "I will help you, my God, not to extinguish yourself in me. It's my turn to help you and to defend to the end your home in us. See how well I take care of you. I do not offer you only my tears and sad foreboding on this windy and grey Sunday; I even offer you a scented jasmine. And I will offer you all the flowers I find on my path, and there are many, believe me. I wish to make your visit as pleasant as possible." (Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*, French edition by Pascal Dreyer, Desclée de Brouwer Publishers).

According to a wisdom saying of our African ancestors, however long the night, day does finally come. In this high-stakes play of darkness and light, Christian faith and hope empower us consecrated women to be bearers of a light, a torch, which the world needs in order to see and warm itself by. At times, this light and fire will be invisible to the eyes of the world but the world will still sense its presence and strength. To conclude this first point, let us recall an image used by Joan Chittister in the title of her book *Fire in These Ashes*. As she explains, this image refers to the process of burying the embers, watching over the fire and carrying the coals "to new places so that they can flame again." (Joan Chittister, *Fire in These Ashes*, 178). In this world darkened by so much drama, wars, violence and disdain for human beings, religious life should create new paths, find a new ability not only to watch over the fire within but also to find fresh opportunities to embrace the world in a profound and totally new way.

2. MYSTICS AND PROPHETS FOR OUR TIME

"Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place" and I did not know it! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28: 16-17). What is said of God applies also to God's prophets and messengers. In our world today, disfigured as it is by all kinds of darkness, God is present and well represented by God's servants. Countless consecrated persons, both men and women, have witnessed and continue to witness to evangelical strength and love. As in the case of the many African women religious assassinated from North to South in Africa whom I mentioned at the beginning of this talk, our world finds light in the presence and life of the many who speak of God more loudly than the noise of canons and the arrogance of the rich. The words of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews may be applied to the mystics and prophets, our brothers and sisters of today: "Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword: they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented" of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground" (Heb 11: 35-38).

An African proverb (Ntomba) states: "The civet has moved on but the odor of its musk remains" (though you may be gone, your reputation remains). At this point, how can we not call to mind some of those who continue to encourage us and point us toward hope and faith? A prophet and mystic, assassinated while presiding at Mass, Msgr Oscar Romero devoted his life to the defence of the poor and oppressed. He was persecuted and misunderstood because of his political stance. The following words of Msgr Romero are prophetic and should still ring in our tired and discouraged ears: "A Church which is not united with the poor and does not denounce from the perspective of the poor the injustice committed against them is not

the true Church of Jesus Christ.? At the same time that he was denouncing extortions by the military junta in power, massacres, assassinations and other violations of human rights, he was also playing a reconciling role in advocating for peaceful reform and fighting against a spirit of hate and vengeance.

In his struggle for peace, justice and the defence of human rights, was he always understood by the Church? Did he not say that our Christian faith requires our involvement in the world? These are dangerous words for those who maintain that Christianity implies flight from the world. However, how can yeast make the dough rise if it is separated from it? His message constitutes a constant invitation to us: the centrality of the poor in our faith and spirituality, the Gospel as Good News to the poor, the defence of life and the poor.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, small of stature, frail in body, with a faith as solid as a rock, this woman of our time and world witnesses still today to the ?power of love,? to what Christian faith is capable of, even among people of another faith. Nourished by a life of incessant and daily prayer, her prophetic struggle exhibits an extraordinary power and tenacity. She herself gives us a wonderful definition of a prophet in introducing herself: By birth, I am Albanian. By nationality, Indian. By faith, a Catholic nun. As to my call, I belong to the world. As to what lies in my heart, I belong entirely to the heart of Jesus.? To belong to the world through our vocation and to offer our heart completely to the Heart of Jesus, this is the invitation to us still today, the same invitation announced by blessed Mother Teresa. Passion for the dignity of the poor is then born and a mobilization of energies and projects results so that human beings, every human being, of whatever roots, culture, descent and nation, may be honoured as image of God ([www.vatican.va/.../ns lit doc 20031019 madre-teresa en.html-18.01.2009](http://www.vatican.va/.../ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre-teresa_en.html-18.01.2009)).

Dorothy Stang, my American Sister and a missionary in Brazil, spent her life defending Amazonia and the small farmers who were protesting against the big landowners and injustice. On the day of her death, February 12, 2005, as she faced her two assassins, ?she would take the time to take out her Bible so she could say to them: ?this is my weapon? (?eis a minha arma!?) before being struck by six bullets, one in the stomach, one in the back, and four in the head? (<http://mercy.e-monsite.com/blog.sister-dorothy-stang-missionary-martyr,193867.html-18.01.2009>).

Called as we are to live a mystical and prophetic life, we women religious today are challenged by the Christianity, not only of so-called Church people, but also of lay people who truly know what it means to be salt of the earth. In this context, a particular woman deserves mention: Madeleine Delbr el, a French Christian mystic, social worker, essayist and poet. A radical atheist regarding the existence of God, Madeleine is led on the disconcerting pathways of a God who meets her in prayer and reflection. From that moment on, her social work becomes a struggle against all types of exploitation and human oppression. Hers was a deep commitment whereby she also made use of her intelligence in order to change social policy. In my view, what she wrote in 1937 remains a constant challenge for all of us engaged in social work: ?In a given day, it is perhaps more moving to visit five or ten large families and give them, after much red tape, this or that assistance; it would undoubtedly be less moving but more effective to work on a particular legal document which would better family life for all large families, whether they are known to us or not.? Is this not an invitation to each of us to discover in her writing the gift for poetry and the depths of the mystical life of this committed lay woman, our contemporary? (See, for example, *The joy of believing* or *We Street People*).

The list of these men and women prophets for our time is a long one. Let us conclude by remembering my compatriot, the venerable Msgr. Munzihirwa, archbishop of Bukavu. During a life deeply nourished by prayer and his devotion to Mary, he always managed to surprise people by his simplicity, truth and love for all. Along with charity and prayer, his struggle for truth, justice and peace was actually his only weapon. As a matter of fact, two days before his death he was still insisting: ?We Christians must

remember that our greatest weapon is charity toward all and prayer to Christ through Mary.?

All these men and women, prophets for our time, should inspire us. What fire urged them on so that they shone like a precious flame in the midst of their brothers and sisters overcome by darkness of all kinds? Of course, I do believe that there are already among us, in this great hall, women who are mystics and prophets. I have no doubt about that.

3. YOU ARE THE SALT AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD

These words of Jesus addressed to his disciples (Matt 5:13-16) are meant for us today inasmuch as we are called to live a life that is both mystical and prophetic. This is the only way that our religious consecration can be the light which shines in the darkness and pushes back the shadows. Salt only adds taste if it accepts the mystery of transformation and abasement (self-emptying). Light only appears when the wick in our lantern is plunged deeply in oil, when it agrees to be consumed.

As mystics, we women religious of today are called to discover again the power of the Word and of prayer, the great longing to be with Christ in the silence of our hearts and homes. Having personally experienced a God who reveals Himself/Herself to whomever seeks God in the secret recesses of the heart, we are thus fundamentally women who seek and find God in the reality of the world. We must keep our gaze fixed on God, whatever the fragility and limitations of our life; we must model our life on Sacred Scripture; and, finally, we must steadfastly maintain these two attitudes throughout all the vicissitudes of human existence. This is the mystical meaning of our religious life. And continual conversion is the only condition for achieving this life: are our intentions in life and in our religious commitment always totally pure in fact? In our ministry to the poor, in the struggle against injustice and lies, is there not still much of ourselves and little of God? The goal of our religious life is to let ourselves be drowned in God to the point of being stripped of all vanity and external riches: from that moment on, we find ourselves face to face with our inner truth, tormented by the longing for more intimacy with God, and driven by the urge to proclaim to the whole world what we will have intimately experienced and the riches we have will have discovered. A consecrated person's life is always one of conversion as she makes her own the words of Saint Paul: "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." Such a life has the power and gentleness to restore the world to its proper relationship with its Creator.

Thus stripped of ourselves, we can then gain the freedom and clarity of vision we need in order to be prophets in this world. And what is a prophet? A prophet is neither a dreamer nor one who foretells the future: the prophet is a person for the time, aware of breaking points in the flow of time. These breaking points may sometimes be events linked to "moral evil and injustices of human beings to each other which disfigure human communities temporarily or for a longer period." In such circumstances, "as R. De Haes forcefully reminds us, the word of the prophet announces God's moment in the world's moment, challenging human institutions with a tendency to shut themselves on themselves and quench the Spirit who wishes to renew the face of the earth in order to build the Kingdom" (L. Santedi Kinkupu, *The Prophetic Mission of the Church-Family of God in Africa: Post-synodal Perspectives*, 329).

If we are to be mystics and prophets in the world today, we are called to involve ourselves in a world where men and women, bruised by violence, famine, poverty, wars and so many other attacks on their dignity, cry out and appeal for help. By nature, prophets have three tasks: denunciation, annunciation and renunciation. Reflection on our vows and on our manner of living them may help us to find new ways of being prophetic today. How do we understand the vows or continue to understand them? We certainly do maintain that they are a source of freedom, pathways to freedom, maturity and fulfillment, but concretely what do we make of these evangelical counsels?

Denunciation

John's Gospel emphasizes that Jesus came into the world to give life, life in abundance. By our profession of vows, we hope to witness to this life in abundance and help our brothers and sisters to benefit from such a life. We must also denounce then all that harms the life of women, men and children. We denounce all the economic, political and cultural systems which cause the poverty and impoverishment of many nations. Along with Pope Benedict XVI who was referring to Africa in his remarks, we must denounce materialism and religious fundamentalism, toxic spiritual waste exported to the dark continent and the poor of the world (by all those sects who pollute these regions of misery), and the deviant culture of sex and nudity. Religious life must be "a veritable rebellion against degrading political and socio-economic structures which disfigure the image of God in human beings."

It is through an authentic living out of our vows that we express this denunciation. Poor, we speak out publicly in the name of the poor by denouncing, at the cost of our life, riches and enrichment gained through the death and exploitation of peoples. Poor, we make use of all our resources to conscientize the rich concerning the phenomenon of poverty and to help the poor escape from their misery. Chaste, we denounce the desecration of love, rape, promiscuity and sexism, that is, all that would depreciate human love and its sacred character. Obedient, we denounce all that makes children of adults, all that makes human beings irresponsible and keeps them ignorant and unaware.

As well, we must denounce whatever is dehumanizing and oppressive in our own communities. Are we permanently healed of racism, tribalism, and the privileging of some over others for reasons other than sisterhood and common life? Should we not question ourselves on the fact that many of us leave our congregations when our community life no longer has a sisterly spirit, let alone a sense of humanity? In truth, when our laws become heavy dehumanizing "burdens" we must denounce whatever debases the dignity and worth of human beings.

Annunciation

The prophetic character of religious life today must be expressed through proclamation of our values and of all that constitutes the grandeur and dignity of human beings.

By our freedom vis-à-vis earthly goods, our refusal to accumulate for the sake of accumulating and by committing our resources to the service of the poor, we witness to the fact that the goods of the earth belong to everyone.

By our chastity, we proclaim universal brotherhood and sisterhood and we teach people how to truly love again. Passionate for God whom we learn to know in the silence of our prayer and our encounters, we gradually become passionate for wounded and abandoned humanity, that humanity especially dear to the heart of Christ. We then become involved with the poor who frequent soup kitchens, with the dirty and abandoned children of our modern cities, with suffering widows, with raped and battered women whose cries are drowned out by the selfishness and insecurity in our societies. We become passionate for that humanity which, in the absence of love, has become incapable of loving. This is the humanity we wish to love with a love which respects people's freedom while at same time liberating all their power to love. We are sometimes called to a heroic love.

By our obedience, we proclaim each person's worth and ability to contribute to the humanization of the world when attentive to the word of God.

Renunciation

As prophets, we women religious must learn today to renounce our own securities, our own compromises

with the powerful and rich, if we are to be credible. We must learn to evangelize ourselves continually since there are areas of darkness within us also and paths to truth blocked by our selfishness and fears. We must renounce all that prevents us from being authentic bearers of hope, faith and charity. While some congregations in many parts of the world dispose of just enough income to ensure their members' formation and the living of the vowed life, in other parts of the world women religious are considered part of the world's privileged. The temptation is then great to live a wealthy lifestyle or be party to the oppression and exploitation of people via the businesses we support. Prophetic by our vows, we must renounce in all its forms, an ownership which disfigures the image of God in human beings.

It is particularly like one Gospel scene: the anointing at Bethany where Mary, Martha and their brother seek to honour and celebrate their common friend. They each have their role to play but one thing is clear: their savings have gone into buying a costly perfume. Should religious community not become more of a Bethany where each member renounces her own self-interest and puts in common all that can contribute to feasting daily The One who unites us and helps us grow as individuals and as a group? Does a Bashi proverb not state in fact that 'a single tree does not give much shade'? It is by pooling all our efforts and moving beyond all that divides us that we will make of our communities places of sisterhood, friendship in the Lord and peace and truth.

d. Community Witness

The world needs credible witnesses, not only that of individuals but also that of a community. It is the community which must be prophetic. Is the community committed enough to bear this kind of witness? Do our present communities give a sense of the future of religious life? Community should wake us up and inspire us as, for example, in the case of the Jesuits killed for being awake as a community and fighting for justice and peace or the Trappists who died because they committed themselves together to defend the oppressed, etc. There are many other examples. I do not imply, however, that everyone should die as martyrs.

Are the welcome and solidarity of our community life inspired by this flame so that we become more and more the mystical and prophetic women of the Gospel we proclaim and live by? As Abbé Pierre said, the voice of the voiceless must keep the powerful from sleeping. Let us be this voice again today.

4. ACTIONS DESIGNED TO RADIATE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

As articulated, this fourth point may seem somewhat pretentious. Is it really possible to suggest concrete actions each congregation and each woman religious throughout the world should undertake in order to witness to the value of religious life? All I can do in fact is offer a few thoughts which can lead to concrete actions while taking into account the situation in a person's own continent, country and mission. Yes, in the name of our mystical and prophetic vocation and in the name of suffering and poor humanity, we must commit ourselves at this very moment. It is no longer enough for us to moan, to whimper over our troubles, over the huge number of rapes of our sisters, mothers and daughters, over the exploitation of the resources of the poor, over the destruction of the earth and of nature. Our modern martyrs, beginning with Dorothy Stang, urge us to greater action and involvement.

First Action: The Sound Formation of Women Religious

For religious life to be worth its salt in the world now, we need thinkers who carry us beyond kind words and good deeds for desperate people, beyond the kind of charity that makes the obscene palatable to the kind of justice that makes the obscene impossible.

We need moral observers of the universe who will call us back to the heights of humanity from the

murky depths of the kind of mad progress won at the expense of the invisible poor? (Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes*, 138).

Let us pay tribute at this point to all the women religious who undertake research in theology, sociology, anthropology, economics, politics, law and every other area. Thanks to their work, we gain the knowledge to enable us not to be complicit in the suffering of the poor. Formation is necessary and must be valued today. Our apostolic commitment and formation are necessarily intrinsically linked: for attentiveness to the poor of the world must go hand in hand with study of the causes of their poverty. If we are to be moral observers in the international community, we need to look into the whole question of the debt of the Third and Fourth World and why they went into debt. Our growing awareness concerning the issue of ecology demands that we use our reason to become informed as to the true causes of the destruction of our forests, the pollution of our waters, etc.

The issue of women, of their exploitation and the violence to which they are subjected throughout the world, must prompt us to learn about the history of cultures and peoples and work in depth intellectually to uncover all the areas where women are subjugated in the name of religion, culture, etc. If we do not have an adequate human, moral and intellectual formation, much of our social activism can seem a mere slap on the hand to systems which destroy the dignity of women. For the sake of this world in transformation which calls for gifts of understanding and creative fidelity, should we not improve the quality of education within our congregations? In effect, education gives depth to our spirituality and value to our apostolic commitments, and it emphasizes as well the prophetic dimension of our spirituality and charism.

Second Action: Involvement in Ecclesial, National and International Organizations

While it is true that our vocation prevents us from becoming actively involved in politics, our prophetic vocation would not have us abandon certain spheres of influence and management. In terms of the Church, we are to take an active part in Justice and Peace Committees at the diocesan or national level. As I just said, such a commitment presupposes solid human and intellectual formation without which our presence can only be tokenism and ineffective. On the national political level, in our commitment to the cause of the vulnerable, of women raped and battered, we can target national assemblies through associations and organizations campaigning for human rights. By forming lay people who can take an active role in politics and by seeking out partners in public institutions, we can take action, indirectly, certainly, but effectively. On the international level, as far as various bodies of the United Nations are concerned, we can and must find ways to make our voices and those of the poor and victims of the world heard.

Third Action: Networking Concerning the Broad Issues of Justice and Peace

We can seek to influence public institutions with information received from different parts of the world through intercongregational communications. In any case, our world also needs to see us leaving our cloisters – some congregations act sometimes like sects – to take common action developed through the expertise of many congregations.

CONCLUSION

Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch? (Lk 5: 4). As we conclude our reflection on the theme: *Called To Illuminate With Prophetic Light The World of Darkness*, I wish to dwell on this invitation of Christ. How commit ourselves in a prophetic way to the transformation of our world and our congregations? Jesus tells us: *Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*

Relying on the word of Jesus, putting out into the deep water means accepting to come into contact with the world through the risk inherent in religious life. Our vows in fact intend that our way of life shake up and should shake up the world because the light is not immediately welcomed by those who prefer the darkness. They also mean that we commit ourselves to living on the frontier, in places where people are trying to build a more just and fraternal world.

What seeds for the harvest could we plant together today which would make a difference, now and for the future, for us women religious called to fill dark places with prophetic light? Christ who invites us to put out into the deep has confidence in us: "You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth" at this very moment. Let us trust him and each other. A wise African proverb (Toucouleur) states precisely that "the fingers are the hand's ornaments." May we, marvelous creatures and witnesses of God that we are, bring glory and honour to God in this world!

Thank you.

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