

## Meeting of KOVOSS'CORISS «With You» - 24 September 2018, Baar (CH)

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Participation from UCESM: Sr. Marjolein

Since I was in Baar already the evening before, I had the opportunity, like some other people, to enjoy evening meal and the following day breakfast with the Cardinal.



*The only picture of (a part of) me confirming my presence ....*

400 members of Catholic and reformed religious orders and of new movements met on Monday, 24 September, for the Swiss Day of religious in Baar.

### MORNING

At the opening of the meeting, Peter von Sury, Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Mariastein and President of the Association of the Major Religious of Switzerland VOS'USM, welcomed the attendees and looked happily on the packed hall.

Joachim Eder, a State Councillor of Zug, made the welcome address. He drew a bleak scenario in his short speech. Daily life in society is dominated by sensory overload, anonymity and the pursuit of material goods. Modern man suffers from permanent strain in an ever more confusing world. Therefore, he considers that the religious orders play an important role as a social corrective. He called on the religious to become increasingly aware of this «compass» function.

The keynote speaker of the meeting was Cardinal João Braz de Aviz. He picked up where Joachim Eder had left off and spoke about the huge challenges that the religious orders have to face. The Prefect of the Congregation for the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life was pleased to meet the whole “bandwidth” of religious life. As Pope Francis often does, the Cardinal put his ten-page speech manuscript aside adding: «Reading interferes with communication». He expressed himself spontaneously on current key words of life in religious orders, congregations and new movements (religious life, education, ecumenism, the status of women, young people).

The Brazilian Cardinal thinks that religious life is threatened in its very existence in many parts of Europe. He appealed to unity saying: «We must be on the way together, maintain diversity in unity and not annihilate one another in mutual separation conflicts».

A united and joint presence is sorely needed, because in the near future contemplative life will decline by fifty percent because of ageing in the monasteries. And also within the active communities, there are unfortunately ageing communities in some regions which do not accept novices anymore because these would feel «like grandchildren with many grandparents». The Cardinal condemned this approach as a «spiritual euthanasia».

In order not to be discouraged, it is worth looking at other countries where religious life is almost «exploding». He mentioned the situation of Catholics in Vietnam which counts up to 250 religious communities. "Every year a thousand new novices join communities there. This should encourage us", the Cardinal stressed.



The prominent speaker from the Vatican had brought with him a long list of demands. For the religious orders to remain, they need to move, to internally renew themselves. He called on religious people to not only cultivate the ecclesiastical traditions, but to find and hold intensive talks with the young people of today. He recalled the Second Vatican Council, when the Church started to see itself as the people of God. «A people of God, this is especially us, the religious».

João Braz de Aviz regretted that some men have a troubled relationship with women. Often men complained: «Women are a temptation for me». This attitude is contrary to the order of creation according to which God has created men and women as equal human beings. It is thus necessary that they are on the road

together. Many new movements («movimenti») have both women and men in their ranks and are therefore a beautiful witness for gender equality.

During discussion, a sister reminded that the current Canon law requires the submission to the will of the superior. Apparently the new vision of the Council has not been included here.

Looking at the members of religious orders in the Churches of the Reformation present in the meeting room, João Braz de Aviz urged to increasingly organise ecumenical meetings in the future, «otherwise we will turn into a closed group which looks only at himself». The Cardinal also asked for more humility and modesty in the execution of the offices and in dealing with other people.

He told about his encounters with Pope Francis. He remembered in particular an impressive scolding of the Pope, when the latter criticized the pompous appearance of Cardinals and called out to them «they shouldn't wear such thick rings». He himself would only wear a simple wooden cross around his neck. «Jesus was also nailed to a simple wooden cross», the guest from Rome stressed.

The «spiritual double life» which João Braz de Aviz watched with colleagues weakens the Church from the inside. A reverse trend is requested. That is to say: «Be close to people and think Church not from the top, but from the bottom».



But what must remain immutable for Cardinal João Braz de Aviz is to fix Jesus as the center. He recalled in this context the Council document «Lumen Gentium» which reads: «Christ is the light of peoples».

Personal testimonies gave insight into how religious people implement the motto of the day «with you» in the areas

- children and young people
- marriage
- migration and
- age and death.

During the afternoon, after a Franciscan (Catholic) and a Deaconess (Protestant) sister had told about their friendship and said they wanted more ecumenism in religious life, some personal testimonies were to be heard: e.g. religious orders and communities give people in different life situations time and attention, or representatives of religious communities as «**La Famille St Jean**» whose brethren are active in pastoral work in parishes, schools and universities.

A representative of «Ordo Virginum» (consecrated virgins in Switzerland) also took the floor.



And there was a testimony of how the young Brazilian community **Shalom** evangelizes young people for instance in their own pizzerias. Brother Johann Clerc introduced them. The movement was founded in 1986 on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II. in Brazil. The young theology student reported that all over Brazil the movement is building «Centers of evangelization». «We are present also nearby discotheques, because there are many young people around and we can get into conversation with them». «La Comunità Shalom» has also been active since 2001 in the Italian Switzerland (Stettin).

A German Swiss couple showed how the movement «**Marriage Encounter**» had saved their marriage. And a Swiss couple reported how the «**Communauté de l'Emmanuel**» means a help for family life.



In Solothurn the existing **Scalabrini community** supports migrants. A member admitted: «I always wonder when I'm in contact with strangers, what I would do in their situation».

In the home of the Deaconesses in Bern and in the nursing home of the **Merciful Brothers of Maria Hilf**, countless people are lovingly accompanied to death.

An ad-hoc group of music often allowed times of reflection and deepening during the meeting. It consisted of two sisters of Menzingen, of a Benedictine and a Jesuit.

It was a beautiful day with many good encounters. I promised to come back the next time ...

Haelen, 6 October 2018

Sr. Marjolein