

On the path to transformation



This meeting in Rome aimed to discuss issues of transitions of Religious life, its decline and end or accomplishment, and fulfilment of Institutes. It was a concluding meeting on that urgent matter initiated by the German and Dutch Conferences with the Dicastery, and then extended to other Conferences that experienced similar issues, meeting which initially occurred in language groups. At the end it felt like stepping on the path to transformation.

In an opening remark pointing out the semantics of the term 'crisis' - as in Ancient Greek κρίσις - meaning separation, power of distinguishing, decision, choice, election, judgment. And as such invites us to think about opportunities depending on our discernment and decisions. Despite the dramatic decline of Religious vocations and increasingly senior communities, a positive outlook is not an evasion of the reality, which in the meetings was faced openly and honestly, but rather a recognition that Religious life goes through a profound transition, as often was pointed out. It is going to be smaller, but it will be much harder to answer the question of identifying Religious life, including charisma, mission, lifestyle, cooperation and collaboration with Lay people, the local Church, and so many more diverse nuances and aspects that deserve to be addressed.

Often, such meetings bring together diverse people, which is enriching and inspiring, and it provides space for discussions which is much appreciated. Though not always an easy endeavour, not only because of linguistical challenges and cultural and social-historical situations in the diverse countries but also the complexity of relationships caused by statuses among Dicastery, national Conferences, Unions such as USG, UISG, UCESM, Bishops' Conference representatives. To some extent, this was also a topic that was dealt with. In the context of shrinking Religious life, what is the role of Conferences of Religious unions, and what is the relationship with the Dicastery? The Dicastery proposed to deal with the questions such as: What are the competencies of the Conferences? How to strengthen communication between the Dicastery and the Conferences? How to accompany Institutes to be aware of their own situations? How to promote and accompany more effectively all stages of formation?

With the moderation of French sisters, the participants worked on defining issues and plans of action on themes such as charisma and innovation, the role of lay people, accompaniment in the form of a team of specialised people able to help at different stages of the Institute, continues formation, Conferences as the resource and networking platform, improvement of communication and collaboration with the Dicastery and Bishops' Conferences.



It is good to see such a meeting organised because it is a chance to talk directly, and in this meeting, the Dicastery was represented on its higher level with the presence of the Prefect Joao Braz Card. De Aviz, General Secretary Msgr. Jose Rodriguez Carballo, two Undersecretaries Sr. Carmen Ros Nortes and Fr. Pier Luigi Nava. It gives a sense of belonging and that we are all in this together, which also means that we need to take our part of the responsibility to act to bring about the changes we are longing for. It makes to think about the changed ecclesiological outlook, which is synodal; everyone involved and responsible for this common way and aware that we are still learning how to walk together.

There is a sense of being a pivotal moment in the life of the Church and not just because of the crisis the Church is going through but also hopefulness that the sinodality process initiated as well as this meeting of the Religious. The more we meet and talk, the more joy, hope and faith are revealed, and we should not miss the opportunity to answer the much larger and fundamental question of who we - the Church - are. Because at the end of the day, we should not just manage Religious life or survive but strive. This will be possible when we bravely and honestly deal with the big and existential issues.