

“*And it is all one love.*”

Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, Chapter 59
(circa 1413)

The Contemplative and Prophetic Witness of Apostolic Religious Life

Dear sisters and colleagues, I would like to add my words of welcome to those already offered to you. It is a joy for the general council to host this meeting! We are very grateful to Sister Roxanne for conceiving the idea and for *all* she has done to bring it to fruition. Heartfelt thanks also to Sister Carol Jean who has worked closely with Roxanne each step of the way. It has been a great work! We are proud of the agenda and its goals.¹

Sister Eileen Reilly, with her ministry at the United Nations, collaborates so well, and often, with S. Roxanne, and we are grateful also for that. Twice a year the general council meets together with Sisters Eileen and Roxanne. We had one such meeting a few days ago and, I must say, we were all animated by their energy and passion and by the good news each one shared regarding her ministry within the congregation and her collaboration with others on behalf of all of us.

The general council agreed to convene this *Shalom* Seminar for a number of reasons. First, it has an educational and formative purpose. This is articulated clearly in the description of the purpose of the seminar on our agenda. Secondly, at the general chapter in 2017, we will mark the 25th anniversary, or the silver jubilee, of the decision to establish a congregational network for the promotion of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Jubilees are wonderful occasions to celebrate, evaluate, and renew. Hopefully, this coming together of branch representatives, *Shalom* contacts and provincial councilors with the general council will enable a deep visioning of the direction and future of the network. We believe that nothing takes the place of face-to-face, personal encounters. We are confident that this opportunity will enhance your future electronic communication and facilitate greater collaboration among you. We hope that you will leave here with a renewed vision of your role in our congregation, a congregation that is, as we know, increasingly smaller, older and more interdependent.

We thank you *all*, dear sisters and colleagues, for your generous commitment to the work of animating our sisters, promoting the social teaching of the church, and striving for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. We are delighted to welcome you here to our international home.

This gathering is also a perfect opportunity to introduce Sister Kathy Schmittgens who, in September, will take up from Roxanne the coordination of the *Shalom* Network. Welcome, Kathy, and thank you for your openhearted yes to this ministry. It is so fitting that you can meet your collaborators in this setting and in this context.

¹ I encourage the sisters of the congregation and our colleagues to read carefully the agenda. It can be found on our international website: www.gerhardinger.org, in the languages used at the Seminar: English, German, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Just a word about our setting here at the Generalate in Rome. Most likely, you already have noticed the generous service and hard work done by the sisters of our local community and by our lay staff. They are not many in number, but they do the work of many; and they do it with joy and humor and open hearts! We cannot thank them enough.

There is one other thing about the setting that I would like to point out to you. This morning we began with the Eucharistic Liturgy and concluded it by processing from the chapel into the aula. Of course, no one has to explain the symbolism of that movement. What I want to point out is the particular significance it has here in the Generalate. The back-and-forth movement from the chapel to the aula, from the aula to the chapel, is part of the sacred history of the congregation. All of the general chapters between 1968 and 1992 took place here in the flow of this dynamic movement. As with all general chapters, they required prayer, hard work, commitment to dialogue and self-gift from all participants. They took place during the unique “post-conciliar” years of our renewal, which included the long process of writing of *You Are Sent* in international, multicultural dialogue.

I invite you to remember that as we gather here every day, for you are now part of the sacred history of this place. Together, in the coming weeks, we will write another chapter of that history. Great women from every part of the congregation have gone before us. Many of them sat where we are sitting now. I pray that we may be worthy of what they have handed on to us and make our contribution to the life and mission of the congregation as God directs us.

As you see from our agenda, my topic for this morning is: *Living the Gospel in the 21st Century: The Contemplative and Prophetic Witness of Apostolic Religious Life.*

That sounds so exalted! In fact, the topic is quite intimidating. What on earth can we say that will have a real and practical effect in our lives and ministries? We are all struggling simply to understand the unprecedented challenges of this century. I name just three such challenges:

- *Technology:* The evolution of digital technology in daily life has allowed rapid global communications and networking to shape modern society in profound and still-unfolding ways. It is so important that we recognize this and reflect on it from the perspective of the Gospel. It is incumbent upon all responsible persons, but especially educators, to evaluate critically the role and uses of communication technology and the impact they have on human development and relationships.
- *Terrorism:* This is a global phenomenon now. There is no one of us who has not been impacted by terrorist threats and acts, the purpose of which is to create panic and fear in the hope of furthering some political, social or religious objectives. Such religiously or politically motivated use of force or violence against persons or property is designed to intimidate or coerce a government, a civilian population, or any group, really. Sadly, it is a significant characteristic of this century.

- *Tragically negative consequences of the Industrial Revolution:* Recognition of some of these consequences has become widespread in recent decades. They include the destructive impact on the environment of high levels of consumption of the earth's resources and the gross inequity in levels of participation in the wealth and benefits of scientific and economic development.

These are three of the most significant challenges facing the human community today. You could probably list others. The point is: if we are going to talk about living the Gospel in the 21st century, we need to face them. If the contemplative and prophetic dimensions of apostolic religious life mean anything, they have to be seen in relation to these world realities.

The three popes we have had in this century have all spoken eloquently on these topics. Most recently, of course, we have Pope Francis' much anticipated encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.² Frequently referred to as the encyclical on the environment, his letter actually reaches deeper and tries to highlight the *interrelationships* among the critical challenges of our time.

I know that later in the seminar we will take time for personal and communal reflection on this encyclical. Becoming familiar with it is an important part of your work in the *Shalom* Network because, as Pope Francis himself makes clear, this encyclical "is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching."³ I have read it carefully and find it to be a great resource for dialogue with almost any group you can imagine. The Holy Father appeals for such dialogue – "dialogue," he says, "about how we are shaping the future of our planet." And, he continues, "We need a conversation which includes everyone!"⁴

Now, dear friends, a confession: At this point, when writing this talk, I stopped. I was stuck here for days. Every time I went back to it in between my other work, I could not move forward. Even as I was writing the last two paragraphs about the recent encyclical, I could feel myself drifting away from the point. I had clearly expressed the point a moment ago. The point is this: If we are to live the Gospel in the 21st century, we must be aware of, reflect upon, and face up to the reality of the world situation today. If we, as apostolic religious, are to give contemplative and prophetic witness to the Gospel, we must place ourselves – or, more precisely, *allow the Holy Spirit to place us* – in real and effective relationship with the significant challenges facing the human community in our time.

So, why was I stuck? Why could I not simply write about that? I will tell you why.

- I was stuck because the challenges facing us today sometimes paralyze me. So many situations seem intractable, insoluble.

² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, *Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home*, 2015.

³ *Laudato Si'*, n. 15.

⁴ *Laudato Si'*, n. 14.

- I was stuck because some of what we say today about “being contemplative and prophetic” wears me and leaves me feeling empty. Sometimes I hear sisters speak about contemplation as if the era of evolutionary consciousness invented it. Or I hear sisters say, “we should do something prophetic” with regard to this or that. I believe the reality is both simpler and more profound than that.

Let me ask you this: When you think of someone whom you regard as an “authentic religious,” what would you say is true of her? Think, now, concretely of someone you know. Who, for you, is an example of our life well-lived? What would you say of her? Would you say that she is someone who is in touch with God, someone for whom her relationship with God is basic to all she is and does? Would you say that she is a disciple of Jesus, that she makes the kingdom of God just a bit more present by who she is and what she does? Would you say that, *for that very reason*, her life is a prophetic witness in this fragmented world of ours? That is what I would say of her. On the one hand, it is simple; on the other hand, it takes a lifetime . . .

- Finally – and here is the heart’s core of my difficulty – I was stuck because I found I could not speak to you about any of these matters without opening myself to transformation, without attending to the call of God pressing upon *my* heart, without coming face to face with my need for conversion. And I have been far too busy in the past months to get involved in all that. However, I could not move on, I could not find any words for today, until I opened my heart and tried to listen more attentively to the Holy Spirit.

So there you have my confession. I am still busy. I still do not attend enough to the Lord, but at least I was given a way forward for this day, for this task. I was given one criterion for determining what I will say about this morning’s topic. My one focus will be on sharing what might be helpful for our sisters and colleagues who may also feel stuck for some of the same reasons I have articulated. If I can do that, I believe I may help you also, even just a little bit, in your ministry of education, animation and collaboration within the *Shalom* Network. In this way, perhaps my struggle, *our* struggle, will bear fruit far beyond the walls of this precious aula.

I will re-state my fundamental thesis and then share five insights and one conclusion.

THESIS

If we, as apostolic religious, are to give contemplative and prophetic witness by our living of the Gospel in the 21st century, we must allow the Holy Spirit to place us in real and effective relationship with the significant challenges facing the human community in our time.

INSIGHTS

To develop the thesis, let us start with the significant challenges. The human community is faced with two crises which cry out to be addressed and which must be addressed together. I refer to the environmental crisis and the crisis of global poverty.⁵

The following insights are aimed at allowing the Holy Spirit to put us in real and effective relationship with these crises as disciples of Jesus Christ with a mission in and for the world. It is my hope that these insights will be taken up by you and expanded further than is possible here and now. Each one has potential for so much more development than I can offer today.

1. The first insight is this: *It is important to be aware of our own cultural assumptions and of the convictions we take for granted.*

A. *The Environmental Crisis:* Skepticism about the truth of climate change and global warming is found in many sectors of society, especially in the developed world. This is astonishing when one considers the fact that 98 percent of the scientific community supports the position that human activities have changed the climate.⁶ The lack of recognition or awareness of the impact of patterns of human consumption on the environment is directly related to the strength of the belief in the market economy and commitment to unlimited economic growth.

I purposely used the word “belief” in the preceding sentence. Some argue today that the market is one of the most successful religions in human history.⁷ Not evil in itself, the market economy nevertheless becomes deeply problematic when it is made absolute, when it functions as a kind of god around which society directs its time, attention and devotion. It offers a vision of secular salvation based on the fundamental values of self-interest and accumulation.

⁵ In paragraph 16 of the Introduction to *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis alerts us to watch for nine recurring themes in the encyclical, one of which is “the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet.” Indeed, the theme is repeated throughout the letter. See especially numbers 48-52.

To the English-speaking world, I offer one resource that I found very helpful with regard to these issues and the challenges they bear for Christian witness today. It is Matthew T. Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision: Christian Spirituality in a Suffering World*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014). The book was helpful to me in two ways. First, Eggemeier clearly shows how the sacramental and prophetic traditions of Christianity are important resources for responding to these two crises and their interrelationship. Secondly, he provides a wonderful bibliography. I referred to many of the sources he draws upon. I will give some of these references throughout the paper.

⁶ Pallab Ghosh, “Study Examines Scientists’ *Climate Credibility*,” BBC News, 22 June 2010, (see: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10370955>; from Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 50.

⁷ Eggemeier, (*A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 113), quotes David Loy on this point. Other authors who argue in a similar fashion include Johannes Baptist Metz, Harvey Cox, Philip Goodchild, to name a few.

We know that a significant factor influencing climate change is the increased amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. We face a serious level of destruction of the biosphere because of the devastating effects on all living things. Developed nations contribute disproportionately to the current amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere, but it is the poorest countries in the world that will suffer the most devastating effects of climate change. These are facts available to anyone who is not blinded by unquestioned assumptions and convictions about the way things are and ought to be.

You know the facts better than I do, so I will offer just one interesting statistic. The population of the United States is about 315 million people. It has been estimated that if the world population of 7 billion people used natural resources at the same rate as the United States, the earth would be able to support only 1.4 billion people.⁸

How do we address this? One place to start is to be clear about what religion we are following. What assumptions and convictions are we taking for granted? Keep these questions in mind as we go along.

B. The Crisis of Global Poverty: Jon Sobrino, the Spanish Jesuit who worked for years in El Salvador, has spent his life trying to help us recognize the authority of the suffering poor over all else. He, too, casts the crisis of global poverty in religious terms. He maintains that the fundamental question has to do with the relationship between faith and idolatry. We all give ourselves to what we regard as ultimate. The true God, he says, is at war with false gods to which we have surrendered ourselves. Humanity has to wake up, open its eyes, to see just what it is to which we have given our lives, our attention and our total investment.

Here again, just a few statistics will have to suffice. The wealthiest 1 percent of the world's population possesses wealth equivalent to that held by the lowest 57 percent. Approximately 85 individuals now own as much wealth as the lowest 50 percent (or 3.5 billion persons).⁹

The obvious issue of "distribution of wealth," which these statistics bring to the fore, creates difficulties that block the road to eliminating extreme poverty. Even to use those words is anathema in the religion of the market. What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that we have the resources to eradicate extreme poverty worldwide. This has been true for decades. For some, it was the promise of the new millennium. Why do we not do it? What are your cultural assumptions and convictions about this?

⁸ Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster, *What Every Environmentalist Should Know about Capitalism*, (NY: Monthly Review Press, 2011), page 28; quoted in Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 44.

⁹ References to the work of various researchers who produced these statistics and many more can be found in Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 106.

2. The second insight I offer is this: *Theologically speaking, one of the root causes of both the environmental crisis and the crisis of global poverty is the forgetting of God.*

This insight has potential to be helpful to our sisters and colleagues. It was a consistent theme in the writings of Pope Benedict XVI and is picked up by Pope Francis in his recent encyclical.¹⁰

- A. *The Environmental Crisis:* The remembrance of God is a central insight in a Catholic response to the environmental crisis. In the early centuries of Christianity, theology included the natural world as a third consideration, interlocked as it is with God and human beings. To try to summarize a complicated history in a few sentences, we can say that, with the Reformation some 500 years ago, theological attention shifted to the question of how human beings can find salvation. The working of “grace” in the lives of human beings took center stage and the natural world receded, so to speak, from concern.

Subsequently, with the Enlightenment, human reason came more to the forefront. The natural world was subordinated and meant to serve the needs of human beings. With the Industrial Revolution and the technological culture it produced, the natural world was reduced to a mere resource to be exploited for human efficiency and profitability. Lost is a disposition of contemplative wonder before the world. It is mere material for our use. Let us consider carefully the suggestion that this way of relating to the world is due to the elimination of God as the transcendent creator of all that is. If human beings are ultimate, it follows that they can use and consume the material world for themselves alone. Pope Benedict XVI retrieves classical theology for a very contemporary purpose when he asserts that we must remember God and re-establish a relationship with the world as creation which began with God, is sustained by God, and will be given a future by God.¹¹

We will say more about this in the following sections. However, some clarifying comments might be helpful here regarding why I say that Pope Benedict is, with this insight, retrieving classical theology to meet a very contemporary problem. Classical theology perceived creation in a threefold way: “*creatio originalis, creatio continuo, creatio nova*, that is, original creation at the beginning, continuous creation in the present here and now, and new creation at the redeemed end-time.”¹²

Forgetting the God of original creation means forgetting that all is gift. The truth that everything owes its existence to God is the very essence of the doctrine of creation. “We believe in one God, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible,” we say in the creed.

¹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, numbers 75 and 76 to 83. It also a theme in the work of a number of contemporary theologians.

¹¹ Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Blozano-Bressanone, August 2008, quoted in Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 59.

¹² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. 123.

Forgetting the God of continuous creation means forgetting that being created also means that everything *continues* to be held in life, in ongoing relationship. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson quotes a 20th century philosopher who expresses this insight with a beautiful metaphor: “the Creator ‘makes all things and keeps them in existence from moment to moment, not like a sculptor who makes a statue and leaves it alone, but like a singer who keeps her song in existence at all times.’”¹³ (What a wonderful metaphor for the Holy Spirit!)

Forgetting the God of the new creation means forgetting that the Source of life, in the very act of creating, reveals a radical promise. “At the ultimate end of time, the Creator and Sustainer of all will not abandon creation but will transform it in an unimaginable way in new communion with divine life. Being created means that living creatures are the bearers of a great and hopeful promise: ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev. 21: 5).”¹⁴

B. The Crisis of Global Poverty: In a similar way, the forgetting of God is at the root of the crisis of global poverty. We have already mentioned the ways in which the market is a rival to God. Pope Saint John Paul II wrote about the “idolatry of the market” in which the market takes on an ultimacy in the lives of individuals in a way that rivals the devotion traditionally directed toward God.¹⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez relates this insight to the biblical prophets who made the connection between idolatry and violence against the poor whom God favors. Persons excluded from today’s global economic system are the victims of the idol of money and wealth. “The loss of the lives of the poor is justified as the necessary price that must be paid for the market system to flourish and continue to deliver wealth to the chosen few in the developed world.”¹⁶

This insight, about forgetting God, can be helpful to our sisters and colleagues because it shows so powerfully the need for our contemplative and prophetic witness. The following insights explain further.

3. The third insight I offer for your consideration is this: *Contemplative awareness is a disciplined way of seeing. It requires (daily) attentiveness and openness to God that comes in quiet and silence in the presence of the mystery of the living God. Contemplative awareness can open up the sacramental imagination in relation to the environmental crisis and the prophetic imagination in relation to global poverty.*

Let us reflect together now on what happens when we remember God.

¹³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 123, quotes Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ and Us*, (NY: Continuum, 2003), p. 103.

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 124.

¹⁵ St. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 40.

¹⁶ Summary of Gutierrez on this point by Eggemeier in *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 119.

I am not sure we have given enough consideration to Pope Francis' challenge to religious men and women to "wake up the world"! I fear we too easily view it as a slogan designed to catch the imagination of young religious. In fact, it can lead to renewal for all of us because the first awakening must be our own. We must wake from our own slumber and really see creation, really see our neighbor. This "really seeing" is contemplation or contemplative awareness. It alone is capable of animating authentic prophetic witness.

- A. *The Environmental Crisis*: We have pointed out that the modern era is characterized by a distorted perception of the world as simply available for human use and domination. We have a rich resource for response to the ecological crisis that has resulted from this distorted perception. It is the Catholic sacramental imagination. This is a way of perceiving the world understood as God's creation. God the transcendent creator is immanently present in all creation and, so, everything – *everything* – is potentially revelatory of God. Becoming contemplatively aware of the world is becoming aware of God and is an encounter with God's grace.

I was tempted to make this section the whole of my talk with you this morning. There are a host of authors today who help us to see that contemplative awareness of creation is the best response to the destruction of the environment. They show us that connection with the beauty of the world is what opens the possibility of mourning its destruction.¹⁷ One such author observes that "the primary motive for good care and good use is always going to be affection, because affection involves us entirely."¹⁸ To have affection for creation, I must see it, touch it, smell it, . . . and praise the glory of God revealed in it. It is hard to imagine a more fitting description of the contemplative witness of religious life than that – to see the world as a sacrament of God.¹⁹

- B. *The Crisis of Global Poverty*: "Wake up, open your eyes and see!" is a good way to describe the prophetic response to the crisis of global poverty and the suffering of the innocent poor. This, too, arises from a contemplative awareness that makes visible what is invisible. Johann Baptist Metz says that such vision brings hidden suffering to light, "pays attention to it, and takes responsibility for it." He calls this "the mysticism of open eyes."²⁰ Jon Sobrino maintains that when we wake up we recognize that "the primary location of God's presence in a suffering world is in the primordial 'sacrament' of the faces of the poor."²¹

One of the most striking things for me in the reading I have done in the past months is how common it is for authors – theologians, poets, political leaders from different parts of the world and various cultures – to use the parable of the Good Samaritan to explore the embodiment of prophetic witness. One of the most powerful reflections is from the

¹⁷ Aldo Leopold as summarized by Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 77

¹⁸ Wendell Berry, *It All Turns on Affection*, (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), p. 32, quoted in Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 74

¹⁹ *Laudato Si'*, n. 9.

²⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimensions of Christianity*, (NY: Paulist Press, 1998), p. 163; quoted in Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 124

²¹ Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 129.

American minister and civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. He felt that this parable has the potential to wake the sleeping conscience of humankind. For King, prophetic witness is reflected in the “dangerous unselfishness” that is needed if we are to take responsibility for the suffering of the poor.

Listen to King’s perspective. He notes that, in the parable, the priest and Levite pass the injured man by because they are afraid that, if they stopped, they might be beaten, too. Perhaps the robbers are still around. The question they asked themselves was: *If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?*

In contrast, the Samaritan – a stranger from another race – came by and helped the victim. King imagines that the question he asked himself was: *If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to me?*²²

What a profound reversal of perspectives. The Samaritan really sees. He is awakened to consequences, to life. He is connected to what and who is around him. He is not focused only on himself, but on who he is in relationship. “Dangerous unselfishness.” I believe that this could not have been an isolated incident in the Samaritan’s life. He has been prepared for it by the discipline of contemplative attentiveness.

I find this reflection to be an insightful description of prophetic witness. At its core, prophetic action is selfless, a letting go of the self. It is the opposite of self-righteousness. It involves setting aside self-interest and accepting radical responsibility for the suffering of another human being.²³ It comes from waking up and seeing from the perspective of God. Many of you gathered here do that every day. I praise God for you and I feel blessed to be your sister.

4. The fourth insight I offer for your consideration is this: *The Eucharist is the source of and nourishment for the contemplative and prophetic witness of religious life.*

In every Eucharist, after the consecration, we commemorate the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus in a prayer called the *anamnesis*. It literally means “unforgetting.” It is the opposite of amnesia. Jesus commanded us: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22: 19). In every Eucharist, then, we are asked to remember God, to proclaim what God has done for us in Jesus. We are to be grounded in *memoria passionis*, the memory of suffering, so that it becomes impossible for us to ignore the realities we often like to keep out of sight.²⁴

²² For this summary and quotations from Martin Luther King, Jr., see Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, pp. 159-160.

²³ Here I am moved also by the insights of Jon Sobrino on the parable of the Good Samaritan; see Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, p. 133.

²⁴ Eggemeier, in *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, returns again and again to Liturgy as one of the spiritual exercises that can cultivate the kind of sacramental-prophetic spirituality so needed in our time. For the particular insight referred to here, see, pp. 134-9 where he describes at some length the work of two theologians of the Liturgy, Louis-Marie Chauvet and William Cavanaugh. See especially p. 138 on anamnesis.

This is one insight I hope you can take up and explore further. There is so much here to inspire, nourish and challenge the contemplative and prophetic witness of our lives. It would be very helpful to our sisters and colleagues if we focused more on Eucharist in ongoing formation.

I earnestly urge all of us to take time and, in light of all we have said thus far, read reflectively and prayerfully paragraphs 33 – 35 of the Constitution in *You Are Sent*. These paragraphs express all that we hope for in this Seminar. They express our very life with clarity and depth. Please take time to engage with these passages in *You Are Sent*. You will not come away the same if you do.

5. The fifth and final insight I offer is dedicated to all who get “stuck” in the face of the challenges we have been considering. It is this: *We do not always move directly from awareness to action, from awareness to change in behaviors. We often need help to get from one to the other.*

I believe most of us, and certainly many of our sisters and colleagues, can relate to this experience. Generally speaking, we have the availability of information. We are not without awareness of the destructive effects that some of our daily behaviors have on the environment as well as on continuing the cycle of extreme poverty in our world. It does not always happen that our behaviors change as a result of this knowledge. We can become overwhelmed and paralyzed by the enormity of the problem and feel that our little bit does not matter and will not do much good. This can sometimes lead also to hopelessness and the feeling that the world is beyond change for the better.

I find we often need help to move from awareness to action, from knowledge to change of behavior. I would like to suggest four areas of help and I strongly encourage to you develop these further and add to them. Transformation and conversion to new ways of behaving is what Jesus meant when he invited us to repent and recognize that the kingdom of God is at hand. This is the fullest possible meaning of Shalom.

Here are the four areas I suggest as a beginning:

1. *Beauty*: Experiences of beauty – in nature, music, visual arts, performance, dance – open us to see things in themselves, not for their usefulness but in themselves. For the *beholder*, they inspire hope by their very existence. For *those who create something beautiful*, it can be said that they transcend themselves and express the hidden depths of meaning and life, presence and freedom at the heart of all that is. Therein – in the hidden depths – lies the root, the source, of all effective change.
2. *The vows*: It is not an exaggeration to say that living the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in community creates an alternative world, a world in which our relationships to persons, possessions and power are centered in love. I have often felt that we do not reflect enough on our vows so that we can draw power from the vision of life they create. Our openness to communion, our availability to risk, our letting go into the mysterious

freedom of the will of God . . . all this is a rich resource. I encourage us to pray and reflect on this in a focused and deliberate way.

3. *Trust in the effectiveness of the “little way”*: In the face of what we experience as unmanageable crises, let us reclaim the importance of the small, everyday things we can do. It is true that, without concerted, common, international efforts, things will not improve. However, neither will such essential efforts succeed unless they are supported by personal and local change. The link between micropolitics and macropolitics begins, I believe, in individual hearts and minds.
4. *Humility*: Recovering this virtue, especially in the developed world, is essential to the future of the human community as well as the thriving of the rest of creation. Our daily, contemplative presence to God shows us the truth about ourselves. We are led at times to recognize our need simply to surrender, to let ourselves go into the mysterious and merciful arms of God. This can be a most effective antidote to hopelessness because it helps us to see ourselves for who we are . . . borne up by “the love which moves the sun and the stars.”²⁵

These are only four suggestions of helps toward the transformation to which we are called. What other suggestions do you have?

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude with the last line of *Love Cannot Wait*, the directional statement from the last general chapter. It is a good summary of what I have tried to share this morning. Even more importantly, it is a good summary of our life:

We “deepen the contemplative and prophetic dimensions of our lives by grounding who we are and all we do in the love of the triune God.” (*Love Cannot Wait*)

Dear sisters and colleagues, the Triune God is the single most important point of reference for all we will do during this Seminar.

God who is the unoriginated origin and source of all,
comes forth personally in the flesh to be with us in history, and
dwells within and has an effect upon the world.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Source of all being, eternal Word and Holy Spirit.

²⁵ It is touching how Pope Francis consoles us with the teaching that every creature is the object of the Creator’s tenderness and love. He writes: “Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love.” And then Pope Francis quotes this famous phrase from Dante Alighieri. (*Laudato Si’*, n. 77)

This is the God of love, the God who is love. One God who is
beyond the world (transcendent),
with the world in the flesh (incarnate), and
within the world, bringing it to a blessed future (immanent).²⁶

The 15th century mystic Julian of Norwich ends her brief account of the revelation to her of the triune God with the wonderful words: “And it is all one love.”²⁷

Dear sisters and colleagues, all we are and all we do is grounded in this love. It is why anything exists at all – because of love. It is why we are here. It is why we do what we do – because of the Love who originates, sustains and draws us. It is all *one love*. We have nothing to fear.

²⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 132.

²⁷ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, Chapter 59, quoted in this context by Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 132.