

Symposium on Formation for the Apostolic Life in the 21st Century Pattaya, July 2-9, 2018

Opening Address

In this auditorium, in October 2016, there was held the Canonical Phase of the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Confreres gathered here representing the eighty or more countries in which the Congregation exists.

As the chapter went about its reflection and its work three themes or concerns bubbled along in the agenda surfacing in one way or another in the discussions on most days. These concerns were

- religious life,
- formation and
- secular/globalised culture.

The chapter dealt primarily with the restructuring of the Congregation for mission, but these three issues, among many others, remained on the Chapter's radar. At the same time there remained a feeling of non-resolution around religious life, formation and the secular. To some degree at a conscious level, but certainly on an unconscious one, the chapter knew the these three areas of concern were related. The difficulty was getting a handle on any one of them and all of them together.

Religious life is in a state of transition. At the chapter I remember the confreres from South America drew attention to this fact time and time again. It is also true that we live in an increasingly secular and globalised world. The West experiences this deeply. And it affects the life of faith, the life of Church and as a consequence religious life. You can see the same thing happening in Asia. Here culture may be a little less secular, but it is possibly even more globalised. The last will ensure the onward march of the first. The secular is not something to fear, the chapter reminded us, but something to engage. However, that is an unfinished story presenting the Church and the Congregation with many challenges.

In the middle is formation. With religious life in transition and with the secular world solidifying its influence in nearly every culture, how would a group like the

Redemptorists go about forming members for the religious life of the future or more particularly what St Alphonsus saw as the Apostolic Life - that place where, living in healthy, committed communities, we can go into the world on mission.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor asks the expansive question: "What kind of religion makes sense in a secular world?" That question needs to be answered before the next to which it leads: "What kind of *religious* life makes sense in a secular world?" Some might say that religious life doesn't make sense in a secular world and that it can't. But if you believe in the power of the Gospel and that it is a Gospel *in* and *for* every age, and if you believe in the Apostolic Life St Alphonsus broke open for us, you also know there is a way that our life *can* make sense in a secular culture. Making sense of religious life will not release it from the unfathomable depths of the Pascal Mystery for it will always appear as a contradiction to the thinking of this world in any culture. No, the issue is - will religious life recover its originality, shine forth in transparency and give witness to the joy of the gospel?

Thus we are left with the challenge to begin the deep listening that will be required to take us all to the next stage. That listening may not originate at this Symposium, though for some it might. But certainly deep listening could gather momentum here and guide us to the next steps. But it has to be *deep* listening - not only to what is said, but to what is happening - within us, among us, and around us.

The General Chapter sent out from this auditorium a message to the whole Congregation. It read:

"It is extremely important for us to develop a listening attitude. Let us listen to God, who continues to speak to the heart of persons who are available for God's call. Let us listen to our confreres in community who are our companions on the journey; to the most abandoned, especially the poor to whom we are sent and in an attitude of continuous dialogue with the cultures and religions in which our communities are inserted." XXV General Chapter message to the Congregation, No. 4

Listen, listen, listen. If we did nothing else but listen as a Church at this time we will not have done badly. If we did nothing else but listen as a transitioning Congregation we will not have done badly. If we did nothing else but listen deeply at this symposium, we will not have done badly.

I remember one day in April 2017 the Oceania EPC was meeting on a cloudy morning at the Redemptorist residence in Glendowie in Auckland, New Zealand. It was about the second day of the meeting. We were reviewing the inter-Conference programme for confreres in transition to ministry that was held in Perth, Australia, in June, 2016. Some of you were there.

Our original intent, especially given the positive feed-back from 2016 was to hold in 2018 a further inter-Conference programme for confreres transitioning to ministry. As we reviewed the detailed evaluations of the participants, which were overwhelmingly positive, the council members became more reflective. It was as though as one body the council instinctively knew that another transition to ministry programme was not the deepest need. We fumbled around for some time trying to listen to what we could not put words on. Gradually it became clearer to us that it was formation in itself, ours personally as well as anyone else's, that needed our time and energy. For our own province certainly, but why not for any province interested in being part of the same conversation about fundamentally changing formation cultures as the world around us was crying out to be done and how through them God was also crying out.

Honestly, I think as a council we were a little surprised to end up taking the decision we did. It was certainly not where we started. One of the council members at that stage asked the question: "Could this be the most important thing we do as a council?" Who knows? God can decide that. One of those on the council that morning was John Airey who resigned a month later and who died unexpectedly six months on. May his prayers accompany us this week.

Geographically the Province of Oceania is on the fringe of the Congregation. Go past there and you go over the edge. It didn't therefore seem the best place either geographically or financially to bring confreres together for a symposium such as we are gathered for here. After considering a range of venues we approached the Province of Thailand and asked if we might gather here in July 2018 to look at religious life in the 21st Century, unearthing some of the issues and seeing how we might engage them.

A single email and it was done. Such is the gift of solidarity among the Units of the Congregation! Such is the joy of our brotherhood for the sake of the mission! At this stage I thank the Province of Thailand for walking with us to this Symposium and

creating with us the space for some deep listening, growing awareness and renewed resolve.

It was while visiting the Region of Colombo and the Province of Liguori twelve months ago that I wrote letters to David and Gerardine - letters of invitation to be with us this week. Both replied in the positive. How blessed it was to receive their replies! Shortly later, a further blessing - Tony joined the team. Earlier this year after making enquiries of some confreres who had attended the Emmaus Institute in Manila we invited Gabriel to join the team and his positive reply came to us as truly good news. That's our team. You have listened to their bios. What you heard is what you get. And more. You have yet to see them in action.

I shall leave copies of those bios with you for they are worth your reflection, not only for the presenters' hard work acquiring professional qualifications, but also the wide experience they have gained and their explicit faith in the missions they have undertaken. In preparation for the Symposium the first team meeting took place in September last year at the Vitality Centre in Sydney. Further meetings, telephone conferences and a trail of e-mails have followed. Gabriel's involvement with Manila's Emmaus Centre further builds connections between this Symposium and an on-going institute of considerable repute here in Asia.

Earlier this year I was speaking with a young confrere and matters of formation wove their way into our conversation. I guess after a level of trust built up between us the confrere volunteered to say: "Through my formation I lost my identity". His statement was so bald I almost had to shake myself to take it in. It actually shook me deeply for so significantly grave was the point he made. Just so you know, this same confrere had the resilience and grace to find his life again and is doing fine. Thanks be to God! He was not of my province, though sadly you will find instances like his have happened in every Unit and maybe they are still happening. There may be shadows of that confrere's experience in your own memories of formation, in your own story.

What was at issue here was that presumably good and dedicated confreres and other people were around this man when he entered a formation system, likely seen as satisfactory, but which was eating away at his graced originality, the uniqueness of his person, and blurring the line between who this man was and the religious culture into which he was being invited.

This conversation between me and a confrere reminded me of so many conversations I have had either face to face or in writing with victims of sexual abuse - abuse perpetrated by confreres and others. In most cases the abused person has said something to the affect: "What happened to me took away my soul. It killed-off my faith. I am outside myself and dead inside, I feel lost".

The 2015 Academy Award winning movie, "Spotlight", was a movie about clergy abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston and by extension clergy abuse anywhere in the world. In the movie the character Mike Mezendez, played wonderfully by Mark Ruffalo, poignantly cries out near the end of the movie in reference to the abuse: "They knew and they let it happen".

Confreres, we now *know!* We know that unsatisfactory formation can rob some candidates of their originality, wound the depths of their personhood and diminish their lives. We also know that unsatisfactory formation means that some candidates later in life, and often hidden under the seemingly mystical cloak of clericalism, will go on to spiritually, physically, sexually and emotionally abuse others, most often children and vulnerable adults.

In both cases the words of Jesus come to mind: "*What would it profit a person if they gained the whole world and lost their very self?*" (Mat: 16:26). One might extend Jesus words and ask: "What would it profit the Congregation if it gained the whole world but in so doing caused one person to lose their self, their soul, their being, either in the Congregation or beyond it?"

Here in the Conference and beyond, a few confreres have had hesitations about the Province of Oceania promoting this Symposium. I can understand that. However, if we may, my council and I humbly make this response. *We know what unsatisfactory formation can do to people and we can't let it happen. We know that unsatisfactory formation can be abusive of candidates, for example if they should lose their identity, and we know what it can eventually lead to in the future - the abuse of power and all the other abuses to which that leads. We cannot let it happen. The Congregation cannot let it happen.*

In the Province of Oceania a few months ago we lost a beloved confrere and theologian, Kevin O'Shea. In his own way Kevin spent most of his life promoting the dignity of the human person. In that context he used say: "*Persons are more important*

than institutions. Persons are created by God and are of infinite value. Institutions are human creations of finite value." In formation a person can never be used for the sake of the institution, not even a religious institution, no matter how noble its mission. This moment in history therefore calls for change. But change can be hard. It runs into resistance.

On the feast of St Joseph this year, Pope Francis said: "Complacency is seductive; it tells us there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been" (Gaudate et Exsultate, No.157

But let us for a moment come at this symposium from another angle, just as important as that of which I have been speaking. It is the angle of our missionary vocation. In his Communicanda No.1, November, 9, 2017, Fr General highlighted the fact that there can be no restructuring for mission apart from the promotion of our missionary vocation (cfr #44). Quality formation, he said "must remain a focus of the renewal and revitalization of our Congregation." (No 45)

Thus the title of this Symposium: *"Formation for the Apostolic Life in the 21st Century: What are the issues and how are they to be engaged?"* Because we will not have the time in this symposium we will not get the chance to depth the missionary call in itself. But what we will be giving our time to is the formation of the person who is capable of hearing the call to mission and integrating it into his or her life. That is worth our time here, and may I say it *is* the starting place for all mission. It is from the person of the Father that the person of the Son is sent on mission into the world. It is in the person of the Spirit that the Congregation is called into mission with the Son. Mission is an expression of persons - divine and human. Form the person, form the missionary. Form the person, form the healer who touches wounds. Form the person, form the man or woman who abides in prayer. Don't form the person and possibly lose the lot.

To be a person is to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is the starting point that dares not speak its name. The formation of persons is seeded in vulnerability, that of those to be formed, that of formators themselves. Transparency in all things unveils vulnerability and robs it of its power. There is no key to the development of the human person other than that of vulnerability. Dr. Brené Brown says:

"Faith minus vulnerability and mystery equals extremism.

If you've got all the answers, then don't call what you do faith."

I believe facing human vulnerability is the way to innovation, creativity and change. While the Congregation will need to plan, indeed the Chapter calls us to it, there remains the niggling truth that the renewal of the Congregation and its mission will come by honestly and constructively facing vulnerability, starting with our own. Facing vulnerability personally can set each confrere on fire. Facing vulnerability in community can release in that community its capacity for mission. It is at that stage that planning really kicks in.

In the opening remarks of Communicanda 1, Fr General says:

"When we accept our own personal history as a concrete expression of Redemption, we begin to read and understand our own life in the light of the paschal mystery. Within each Redemptorist missionary, and indeed, within the whole Congregation, there exists a profound experience and memory of plentiful redemption."

(Communicanda 1, No.3 Michael Brehl November 9, 2018)

I would like to share with you some thoughts I shared last week with a gathering of 35 confreres 49 and under in my own province.

I said to them, "I know you want to explore and discern the future of mission. A good place to start might be to consider changing the way we listen to life. And having heard what we may, we might then also touch the vulnerability that will eventually birth innovation, creativity and change. God's ways are not our ways. To avoid vulnerability is to avoid God and to avoid humanity. To avoid vulnerability is to avoid your very self. As witnesses to the Redeemer in a wounded world I know that avoiding vulnerability is the last thing you would want, just as it is the last thing I want."

To Gerardine, Tony, Gabriel and David, I say again: Thanks for being here. Thanks to Manny Rodrigues Delagado from the General Secretariat for Formation for coming half way around the world to be with us. Thanks to Ben Ma our Conference Coordinator for making the time to be with us. And confreres, thanks to each of you for coming to Pattaya and entering into the processes of these days. Thanks for your trust. Thanks to your leaders for encouraging you to come. While we as yet do not know what commission we will take from this Symposium, there will be one given us. At least I hope each one of us leaves here more in tune with his and our

vulnerability, less burdened by any shame and able to listen into everything within us, among us and around us. I pray we go home as witnesses to a reforming formation and catalysts for changes in formation cultures. It is a cliché, but a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. We are honoured by the presence of one another as confreres. We will be further honoured as we listen to one another these eight days. That's the first step.

Pierre Teilhard De Chardin once said:

"To love is to approach each other centre to centre."

Formation for the Apostolic Life begins when each confrere goes to his centre. for it is only from there that he can give himself.

Finally, I leave you with this image from Ira Progoff who said: Each person is invited to go down his or her own well where only he or she can go. But once having descended their own well each may find there the stream that feeds it and which also feeds the wells of all. That's when we can approach each other centre to centre. That is formation. That is formation for the Apostolic Life. There are no short cuts. Therein is the rub. Therein, too, the beauty.

Edmond Nixon, CSsR

Dr. Gabriel Dy-Liacco

Gabriel Dy-Liacco was born the youngest of six children in 1969 in Lima, Peru to Filipino parents. He lived in Peru for two years, spent the next seven years in Japan, and then moved to the Philippines where he spent the remainder of his formative years. While in university, Gabriel discerned a vocation to the Society of Jesus for three years in Arvisu House, a Filipino Jesuit Prenoventiate.

He is currently married with five children and resides in the Philippines. Gabriel serves in the family and life ministry in the Philippines as a moderator for Middle Childhood modules of *EduChild: Loving Couples, Great Parents, Happy Families* and as an instructor in the *Institute for Marriage and Family Development (IMFD)* of University of Asia and the Pacific. When not working, Gabriel enjoys spending time with his spouse and children.

Dr. Dy-Liacco holds a Ph.D. in Pastoral Counseling from Loyola University Maryland and is a licensed professional counselor. Pastoral counseling is a unique discipline that carefully integrates psychotherapy and spirituality. Dr. Dy-Liacco began his clinical mental health work in 1997 and has focused on the treatment of individuals, couples, families and groups for a wide range of issues. These include adult and childhood abuse and trauma, psychiatric diagnoses, personality disorders, addiction, and non-psychiatric problems in living. Since 2006, he has been working almost exclusively with perpetrators of sexual abuse and adults who were childhood victims of abuse by clergy and other persons in ministry, beginning with the St. Luke Institute (Maryland, USA), and, since 2010, with Emmaus Center for Psycho-Spiritual Formation, a Philippine Jesuit ministry serving the needs of the hierarchy and religious of the Church in Asia since 1983.

Dr. Dy-Liacco is also an Associate Professor of the School of Counseling of Divine Mercy University (Virginia, USA) and an Adjunct Professor of the School of Psychology and Counseling of Regent University (Virginia, USA), and was a full member of the faculty of the Department of Pastoral Counseling of Loyola University Maryland. He serves on the scientific advisory board of the *Centre for Child Protection* of the Pontifical Gregorian University as well as on the editorial boards of several mental health journals. His own research focuses on the relationships among faith, spiritual experience, spiritual struggles, and psychological flourishing. In the Philippines, he maintains a clinical practice, provides organizational consulting for dioceses, educational institutions and religious orders, conducts workshops for religious and diocesan formators, and is the institute manager of a newly created *Child Safeguarding Institute* within Emmaus Center for Psycho-Spiritual Formation.

On December 17, 2014, Pope Francis appointed Dr. Dy-Liacco to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults. His appointment was reconfirmed for another three years in February 2018. The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults is tasked with advising the Holy Father on safeguarding matters within the Church and helping him promote responsibility for safeguarding among the particular churches.

Dr. Gerardine Taylor

Dr Gerardine Taylor Robinson is a clinical psychologist and expert consultant. She has practised both here and in United States for over 25 years in mental health.

She worked at the Saint Luke Institute (a psychiatric hospital for clergy and religious in Silver Springs Maryland). For over 11 years, she was the Clinical Director of Encompass Australasia. Under her direction, this service gained an international reputation as a multi-disciplinary team which delivered best practice treatment approaches in an encouraging and non-judgemental environment.

Gerardine has published professional articles as well as presented papers at a variety of national and international conferences. She is an outstanding workshop presenter. Based on her vast experience, she is a very effective consultant to groups and organisations, especially in understanding and supporting members who are struggling with psychological issues which may be impacting their own happiness, work effectiveness or their place in the group.

Gerardine works with adult women and men in a supportive approach to therapy. As well as being a member of the Clinical College of the Australian Psychological Society, she is a member of the following professional organisations: ANZATSA, CSOCAS and ASSERT.

Gerardine took a significant role at the 2013-17 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, especially as appearing as an independent expert witness before the full panel of Commissioners.

Dr Tony Robinson

Dr Tony Robinson is a clinical psychologist. He studied at Loyola college Maryland where he obtained his Masters and PhD.

He has practised both here and in the United States for over 25 years in mental health. He worked at Saint Luke Institute (a psychiatric hospital for clergy and religious in Silver Springs Maryland). For over 11 years, he was the Chief Executive Officer of Encompass

Australasia. He has published professional articles as well as presented papers at a variety of national and international conferences. He is an experienced workshop presenter. Tony works with adult women and men in a supportive approach to therapy.

As well as being a member of the Clinical College of the Australian Psychological Society, he is a member of the following professional organisations: ACPA, ANZATSA, CSOCAS and ASSERT.

Dr. David Leary, OFM

David Leary is a Franciscan Friar, academic and counsellor. He has worked in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland, as a counsellor, manager of social service programs, and as an academic. He was a retreat director and counsellor in Auckland during 2015. From 2011 to 2015 he was the manager of the Asylum Seeker Support Program at CatholicCare in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. He was previously the director of St Francis Social Services, a counselling service and youth resource centre located in the inner city of Sydney. He was also the senior counsellor at the Centre. He worked at the Centre in a variety of roles from 1978 until 2010.

David's primary clinical training and experience is with adolescents and young adults who are experiencing personal and social marginalisation. David has provided clinical consultation, and individual and group supervision, to counsellors at government and non-government agencies. He has also facilitated pastoral planning days for non-government agencies and religious institutes.

David's primary degree was in theology and philosophy (BTh). He holds a masters degree in counselling (MCouns, Faculty Medal), and a doctorate (PhD, Counselling) which focussed on vulnerability, connectivity and the development of resilience in marginalised adolescent males who engage in street-based sex work. David has lectured at the Institute of Counselling (1989-2010), in the Masters of Clinical Drug Dependence Studies at Macquarie University (1989-1999), and in the Master of Counselling program at Australian Catholic University in Sydney (2008-2009). He has researched and written on topics such as: homelessness; youth suicide; HIV, confidentiality and ethics; resilience; adolescent counselling, and male sex work.

He was an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the University of New England (2007-2010), an Honorary Fellow at Australian Catholic University (2007-2014) and a Research Associate at the University of Divinity (2011-2015).

David returned to lecturing in the pastoral theology and counselling field in 2016 and teaches at the University of Divinity (YTU). Beyond Australia's shores, David also teaches in pastoral theology and counselling in Singapore and Timor Leste. He is currently the Provincial Secretary for the Franciscans in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. He is also the Provincial Delegate for Professional Standards and Safeguarding.