



IFC-TOR General Assembly 2013

**ROOTED IN CHRIST, ON FIRE WITH THE SPIRIT,
GO... TRANSFORM THE WORLD!**

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SHAPED, LIMITED – AND HUMANIZED – BY CULTURE

Ethnicity – largely a matter of genetics and *nature* – describes *who we are*; culture – largely a matter of socialization and *nurture* – accounts for *what, how, and why we do* what we do. Among its myriad features and functions, culture locates us as members of a particular social group: tribe or nation, religion or profession, monastery or prison. There is no such thing as a person without culture. Each of the thousands of different cultures and subcultures in the world is the shaper of language and meaning and interpreter of reality and experience. Culture is participative and relational. As one person astutely affirmed, “Nothing living is self-contained; if there were such a thing as an unrelated individual, none of us would know it.”ⁱ Cultures are not random mutations of humanity but marvellous – though imperfect – transformations of what social human beings are; they have a necessary function in creating and maintaining human groups in all their versatility. But transformation – the process of changing from being a helpless baby into a mature adult – is a prerequisite.

Without exception, all expressions of spirituality and faith are contextual and therefore partial and limited, because they too are influenced by the historical and geographical features of culture. Faith can only be expressed through culture – through the way we negotiate our daily lives. So it would be meaningless to think about faith in the abstract, without its particular cultural expression. There are as many ways of being religious as there are cultures, sub-cultures, and individuals. We professed/professional religious are all different, and none of us can be reduced to a type or standard, or conformed to another person’s example or expectations. Yet – and this is critical – though we are all unique and our individuality must be respected, we are also, at a fundamental level, all the same. This is the great human paradox: different ethnically, culturally, and individually, we share a common humanity: anthropologically, we are a single human race. But precisely in and through our differences, we can bear daily witness of our human and spiritual values to each other, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society.ⁱⁱ Sadly, we have hardly learned to use our differences effectively, because culture – and religion – tends to make us adversaries when we could perfectly well collaborate, and critical when we could be far more complimentary.



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Theologically, our common factor as Christians is our striving to be rooted in and united to Christ, but always in our many different cultural, linguistic and individual social locations. In want to tease out some of the implications of this social fact, and specifically to suggest how our differences actually help us to respond in complementary ways to God's initiative, by committing us to the *missio Dei* – God's eternal mission, incarnated and rooted in Jesus, and extended by his invitation to all who are baptized, called, and sent in his name.

Until recently – and in many places still – the significance of culture in the shaping and articulation of people's lived spirituality was seriously underestimated. Religious communities might accept candidates from various cultures, but so long as the directors of formation originated from the founder's culture or a global linguistic bloc, generations of new religious were simply assimilated into a dominant culture or its *modus operandi*. Not only did this seriously reduce the possibility of encouraging religious life to be truly rooted – and thus able to flourish – in multiple indigenous, local forms, it stunted the healthy growth of generations of religious who were expected to think, dress, eat, pray and worship in alien cultural ways. But if authentic Christian spirituality can be described as “a way of being in the world with God”, then – given the *many* cultural ways in which people live, the *many* worlds they inhabit, and the *many* understandings and experiences of God that exist – Christian spirituality should be able to find authentic expression in many different forms that share a common identifiable core: discipleship of Jesus.

Although there have been attempts to respect and accommodate a plurality of forms of religious living, they often seem to be in competition, rather than contributing to a mosaic or composite picture whose many elements are compatible and relevant. This would produce *intercultural* (as distinct from *multicultural*) living, which requires a solid commitment on the part of all and every community member, to transplant themselves from the relative comfort of their own cultural home, and become dis-placed, “out of place” – or, like Jesus, himself a stranger – for the sake of the Kingdom, the Realm of God. Much easier is *multicultural* living, which often amounts to no more than people of different cultures living under the same roof, but each clinging to their own cultural identity and idiosyncrasies, while not being stretched and called to conversion by the demands of a Gospel of radical inclusion and radical equality



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Whether this is due to a lack of appropriate skills, a residual conviction that “the old way is best”, “we know better than you”, or a combination of a spirit of independence and unwillingness to make the effort demanded of *intercultural* living, is a matter for empirical verification. But if religious life has a future, and if the witness of Kingdom-building in the contemporary world through authentic mission and encounter is to remain strong, it can only be through a commitment to *intercultural* living. But only if we are rooted in Christ, individually and collectively, will we be able to grow in – rather than despite – our differences, with the resilience required for transforming the world. The alternative is stress-produced burnout and fatigue, or surrender due to discouragement or apparent failure. Rick Warren, the American mega-church founder and preacher in America, maintains that starting the race is much less important than ending it well. Endurance demands that we “build roots – not fads, gimmicks or therapies,” he says.

ROOTED IN CULTURE, ROOTED IN CHRIST

In order to thrive, every culture must ensure that its new members are solidly rooted through the processes of *enculturation* or *socialization*. Thus the new-born child, rootless and cultureless, becomes part of a pre-existing group: nuclear and extended family, and broader kindred [Fr:*parenté*], gradually maturing into a (re)productive adult, subsequently an elder, and finally an ancestor. Successful (and culture-specific) socialization – *primary* (up to the age of reason), *secondary* (into early adulthood) and *tertiary* (ongoing, through maturity to age) – is the measure of the morally responsible and accountable adult member of society. But while primary and secondary socialization determine the quality of a person’s social rootedness, adaptive skills and maturity will only become manifest during tertiary or ongoing socialization. That is to say, a person’s ability to operate in an initially unfamiliar cross-cultural situation – to produce branch, blossom, and fruit – depends significantly on that person’s sense of self: a strong, stable, culturally well-rooted person will be significantly better-equipped to deal with multiplex relationships in adulthood, than one whose roots have withered or failed to grow, due to poor socialization. Hence the Socratic imperative: first “know thyself.”

The point to ponder is this: research and experience have shown that the more one is rooted in a particular culture, the more readily is one subsequently able to move beyond its confines and



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engage with the wider world. The reach of an organism's branches is significantly correlated with the vitality of its roots. Applying that to religious in the contemporary world, the implication is that only if we are culturally rooted, can we hope to become cross- inter- or counter-cultural (without losing or repudiating our primary culture and its norms); and only if we are rooted in Christ can we later leave home to go in pilgrimage wherever the paths of discipleship should lead. To undertake such a pilgrimage however, we must be both discriminating and open to alternatives. Only with a strong moral core and openness to a "dialogue of life"ⁱⁱⁱ with "the other", will it be possible for us to be converted ourselves, and in turn become agents of authentic transformation.

JESUS: ROOTED IN CULTURE, ROOTED IN GOD

All human beings communicate *culturally*. And we do not just *have* bodies, we *are* embodied: there is no other way to be human. But before we can communicate, we must be located and formed culturally, for all communication is mediated through our individual, embodied person, through a specific language and cultural symbolization. A poorly rooted personality with an inadequate grasp of language will communicate poorly. Jesus, rooted both in his culture and in his *abba* – fully human and fully divine – was thereby able to communicate *himself*: that is, both his message and his person. And those who are called and sent in his name must learn to do likewise.

There are two kinds of knowledge, sometimes called *outer* and *inner*. The former ("*knowing about*") is what we might learn about the ocean depths or outer space – without, of course, ever having been there. Also called *academic* knowledge, it is acquired by intellectual study and perhaps research, and can be perfectly valid. But there is another, equally valid kind: *inner knowledge* (actually "*knowing*"). This is direct or experiential, and is called *apprentice* knowledge.

When Jesus first calls disciples (Matt 11:25-29), he contrasts "the learned and clever", with "little children," and then says "learn from me". These "learned and clever" are the self-designated people who think they have nothing left to learn, while the "little children" are those whose socialization is incomplete: they still have a great deal to learn before being fully rooted in their culture. And Jesus' invitation is not simply to "learn *about* me": that entails the *academic* method. (Academic theology is learning *about* Jesus; contrast authentic Christian spirituality which requires



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the apprentice model, bringing people into personal contact with the teacher). Jesus is calling people to become his *apprentices*, just as he himself had been Joseph's, learning carpentry by watching, handling tools, practicing, whittling, measuring – and advancing by trial and error.

So disciples need to undertake two kinds of *enculturation*: socialization into their own primary culture and into the Christian faith. If successful, they will be doubly rooted. Then their faith will be *inculturated*; and only then will they, in principle, be able to transform the world, which is what their commitment to the mission of Jesus entails.

Here are more thoughts to ponder. First, the classic description by Pedro Arrupe:

Inculturation is the incarnation of the Christian life and Christian message in a particular cultural context, such that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (which would only be superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs, and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation.^{iv}

Next, important insights from Paul VI:

What matters is to evangelize cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth, and right to their very roots.^v

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into account the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.^{vi}

Only a church aware of her universality and show[ing] that she is in fact universal is capable of having a message that can be heard by all, regardless of regional frontiers [culture]. Legitimate attention to individual churches cannot fail to enrich the church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent. It responds to the very deep aspirations of peoples and human communities to find their identity ever more clearly.^{vii}



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And here is Paul to the Ephesians:

May God give you power, through the Spirit, so that your hidden self may grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. And then, rooted and grounded in love, you will have strength; until, knowing Christ's love, which is beyond all understanding, you are filled with the utter fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19).

These powerful expressions identify the importance of the roots of both culture and faith, and require us to respect people's cultural identity as the only way they can live out their faith. But, while culture is undoubtedly important, our life's deeper purpose is our call to be, as St Paul says, "filled with the utter fullness of God" in order to serve God's mission. How we do that, forces us to explore the challenge of transformation.

TRANSFORMATION: CHALLENGE AND POSSIBILITY

The word transformation is prominent in your theme: "Transform the world!" it boldly urges. But before we even leave Assisi, we would do well to try this word for size and see whether it is rather too large and ill-fitting for our feeble shoulders.

We could be the subject or the object of transformation. As subject, we would transform something or someone else: a wilderness into a garden by hard work, or people's typical behavior into something different, by persuasion or coercion. One historian says neatly that the early church transformed the mighty Roman Empire into the powerful post-imperial Christendom, by "flattery and battery."^{viii} If we hope to do better than that, we must realize that true transformation – theologically speaking – is the outcome of divine grace working on human nature-culture. The Holy Spirit is the inspirer, the transformer: by ourselves we can do nothing (cf John 15:5). But unless we are people of personal integrity and virtue, grace will have very little to work with.

So can we consider ourselves as object or recipient? Can transformation happen to us? Can we can be transformed? St Paul told the Romans not to be conformed to the world, but to be



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transformed (Rom 12:2); and he assured the Corinthians that if they remained faithful they would all be transformed (1Cor 15:52). So how can we recognize transformation and commit ourselves to it?

Far from being miraculous or magical, transformation is a rational, rule-governed process. Unfortunately, the word is often used as though it can occur by *fiat* or fantasy. Technically, transformation is *radical change*: fundamental, foundational, and reaching down to the roots. It is an immensely powerful process of conversion: an original reality becomes something new, staggeringly different, and often unrecognizable. The process may be gradual or virtually instantaneous. But invariably, the new reality *is always traceable back to the original condition or state*. Three examples: At 211° Fahrenheit (99.3° Celsius), water is very hot indeed; but when the heat increases by a single degree (212° F = 100° C), it boils and is *transformed* into steam. Steam can power a heavy locomotive, but hot water can do no such thing! Again, by nuclear fission plutonium was *transformed* into the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. *Transformation* can change the world – literally. It can also change people radically; consider a self-confessed lazy religious called Sister Teresa, *transformed* by grace and her cooperation into the great Spanish mystic, St Teresa of Avila.

But there is a two part corollary. First, if we look only at the initial reality –water, plutonium, or a young Spanish woman – it is by no means clear how it will actually be used or what it might become: water can also be transformed into ice, plutonium into fuel to produce domestic electricity, or a girl called Teresa into a famous Spanish opera singer called Teresa Berganza. Second, if we start only with the endpoint, the transformed reality – Adolf Hitler, Robert Mugabe, Michelangelo or Francis or Clare – each of them can be more fully understood if we trace them through their earlier developmental stages. A particular baby may grow up to become Martin Luther or Martin Luther King, and if we study each life we can understand how it was gradually transformed. But neither Martin could be transformed into an angel or a devil, a woman or a child, because that would not be within the laws of nature. For us, the implications are stark: no stone will ever be transformed into bread, no lie will ever produce truth, no violence will ever give birth to peace – and no religious community or individual without tenacious faith, abiding hope, and love beyond death, will ever be transformed and bear fruit that can become the harvest of the Realm of God.



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Transformations – linguistic, musical, architectural or moral – are rule-governed rather than random. So what might we, our communities, or the wider church, legitimately hope for, and what is out of the question? Everything depends on the load-bearing capacity of our foundations, our accumulated wisdom and virtue, and the actual practice of our lives. But some things are certain: just as no wishful thinking can transform a fairy-tale frog into a prince, or a wicked step-mother into a woman you can trust, so, no pious aspirations can transform individuals into disciples hungry and thirsty for God’s justice, or into prophetic witnesses to God’s mission and God’s Realm. Transformation is not magic but it is mandatory if these dry bones are to live. If it is to be more than a slogan it will be because God’s Spirit has kindled the fire again. The Spirit alone can do this, but only if we ourselves become the fuel for the flame.

GOD-ROOTED, SPIRIT-FIRED, WORLD-TRANSFORMING

Perhaps the heading for this section sounds more optimistic than realistic, more pretentious than practicable. But it actually expresses God’s plan for us and indeed our own hopes: to be rooted in God, fired by God’s Spirit, and agents of world transformation. So what’s the problem? Why do God’s plans and our hopes seem so far from reality? We could identify at least three reasons, but this Godly call to be transformed and to go and transform the world depends entirely on our being rooted in God, and on the fire that comes from God’s Spirit alone.

First therefore, we must look deep within ourselves. Are we remotely worthy of being called loyal followers of Jesus, living quite comfortably as many of us do, safe between the extremes. In a world polarized by poverty and riches, repression and freedom, egoism and heroism, religious have found a middle way: we are neither frozen nor burnt – though perhaps rather lukewarm; neither slaves nor libertines – but maybe too quick to claim our entitlements; not entirely self-centered – but certainly not heroes. We may be proud of our “professional” Christianity; but many of us are invisible, because our habits – traditional religious garb or cultural and personal habits – do not identify us as Jesus’ disciples publicly committed to his Way. Illegible signs are worse than worthless.

Second, we might look around, at the scandals racking the institutional church: abuse, of authority or sexuality; lack of accountability or due process; witch-hunting of theologians and women



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religious; and the use of threat, coercion and excommunication. Meanwhile, princes of the church not only remain above the law but flout it blatantly, while bishops close ranks to protect their front, and sides, and rear. As the litany drones on, it sickens and scandalizes the faithful week by week. And the ink flows and the rhetoric peals like thunder, on topics like whether Vatican II was evolutionary or revolutionary; whether or not it changed anything; and why the church cannot (or should) change its rules for ordination of married men or women, the conscientious use of contraception, or attitudes to homosexual persons and acts. In the midst of all this, churches in the northern hemisphere continue to close and the Christian community hemorrhages thousands of members, while earnest Catholics are excluded from the Eucharist in the name of Jesus, who promoted a community of radical inclusion and radical forgiveness. If the institutional church were an individual, no physician would be able to help this patient without its willingness urgently to address some of the self-destructive addictions, bad habits and anti-social behaviors that are undermining personal and family health. So the questions come right back to us, religious, defenders of the weak and silenced, hungry for God's justice and thirsty for righteousness: who do we think we are? How will we ever transform the world? What happened to the fire?

The third reason why God's plans and our hopes seem so unrealized is that while we can be flattered if people mention the word prophet in our regard, we do not have the Christ-roots of Oscar Romero, the compassion of Clare, the fire of Francis or the generous spirit of Jesus. We do not fit the profile of the prophet and we have such a long way to go before we are transformed so that we reflect the face of Jesus. So how might we address our own ongoing conversion and transformation? What might still be possible before death finally interrupts our perpetual good intentions?

BACK TO CULTURE

In every culture there is both sin and grace; and to be well-rooted in one's culture – and sufficiently attuned to another – is to be able both to criticize and to affirm culture in the light of the gospel and our faith. This is precisely what Jesus did in relation to the world in which he lived. But not content merely to affirm or criticize from a lofty distance, his indiscriminate compassion led him



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intentionally to encounter “the other” as he incarnated the *missio Dei* historically in Galilee and its environs.

We can only live out our faith in as specific people in a specific context: the context of embodiment and culture. Transformation is always context-dependent and touches specific people. There are no generic people, no “people in general”, so we cannot love people in general. Every person is particular; and Jesus loved particular people, one by one, in the concrete reality of their culture – of which their faith (strong, weak, faltering or failed) was inevitably a feature. Jesus’ preaching was not abstract but addressed directly to “those with ears to hear” – in his time or in ours.

Here is the final summary of the challenge and impact of Jesus, from biblical scholar Francis Moloney:

God’s saving intervention in the person of Jesus of Nazareth became part of a religious practice, a culture, and a history, but that culture, history, and religion were assumed and *transformed* by his life, teaching, death and resurrection. [His] ‘life story’ broke through the expectations and limitations [the people’s] religion, culture and history would have preferred to impose on him. Who Jesus Christ is, and what he asks of his followers, cannot be ‘controlled’ or ‘contained’ by *any* religion, *any* culture, or *any* history. He calls us to *transform* our particular cultures by defying sin which makes our ways and our absolutes the shapers of our destiny. Jesus’ followers will strive – against all the tendencies of human culture and history to settle for what has been achieved – to *transform* their particular cultures as Jesus strove to transform his. As his life story tells us, it will cost no less than everything.^{ix}

Because Francis was firmly rooted in his own culture and in God, he could both criticize and affirm other people and their culture. Sadly, political correctness within his community and in Rome muffled his prophetic action. Here is Paul Moses in his recent book, *The Saint and the Sultan*, re-appraising Francis’ famous 1219 visit to Sultan Malik al-Kamil:



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The true story of Francis, the sultan, and their peaceful exchange was buried. It did not serve the purposes of popes who continued to drum up support for a string of ill-fated Crusades. Nor did it fit the needs of Francis' order. Francis' thirst for peace and the sultan's noble treatment of the Crusaders were downplayed and forgotten. Francis was turned into a soldier who used the gospel as a weapon. The sultan became a malevolent foe. But Francis thought Muslims could best be approached with love ... [and] tried to stop the Crusaders from heading into a disastrous battle; ... a strain of prophetic opposition to the Crusades ran through sections of the friars. Francis' goal from the start was simply to live the gospels. Two passages stand out in his writings: "love your enemies" (Matt 5:44), and "blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt 5:9). But not once did any of the early biographers of Francis allude to these lines of scripture that meant so much to him.^x

Because it is never too late for any of us, consider Oscar Romero, whose call to transformation came late in life. But the seeds were there, long-planted if apparently dormant. Grace and his cooperation produced abundance that is still being harvested. John Sobrino explains the archbishop's strategy and tactics:

His homilies were unparalleled ... and they reached everyone. This did not happen by accident; it proceeded from serious biblical reflection before giving a homily that would truly bring light to shine on the country's reality. It was reflected in the credibility of his words. Monseñor Romero's hope was to evangelize the structure of society – something seldom even considered these days. He wanted to change the economic and political infrastructure, the legal institutions, the health care and the media. He also wanted to change – evangelize – the ecclesial infrastructure, with its curia, parishes, religious congregations, educational institutions and internal politics. He did not allow himself to be walled up in a sacristy, a pastoral letter, or a mission with limited horizons. He accomplished all this with an exceptional creativity that combined real closeness with people in their communities. He wanted to evangelize the country in its entirety – everyone: individuals, social groups and infrastructures – where there was



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poverty and injustice but also hope, solidarity, faithfulness and martyrdom. There is a deficit of such thinking in the church today.^{xi}

See just how rooted Romero was in his own context; how he could identify both sin and grace; and how he led and inspired, as much as he challenged and condemned. His hope was not modest but mighty! This was not the fantasy of the daydreamer but the tenacity of the prophet. It is very noticeable that John Paul II was not impressed with his challenge to the institutional church; so who was the prophet, Oscar or John Paul? There is a lot of talk these days about the need for religious to be prophetic. Regrettably, some of the rhetoric will not bear close scrutiny, for prophecy is surely not an attribute that any of us should claim. True prophets, biblical or contemporary, are extremely diffident about their prophetic character; and habitually pay for their *charism* with their lives.

The biblical prophet is very different from the priest; and Jesus the prophet came to put an end to the ancient priesthood of Israel and inaugurate a new era when every single person has equal access to, and favor with God. The ancient Jewish priest was sacred, protected by privilege, clothed in brocade, and had access to the Holy of Holies. In stark contrast, the prophet was not sacred but profane, not protected but exposed, not dressed in riches but in rags. *Sacred* implies someone or something commanding religious respect; *profane* (*pro fanum*: 'outside the temple') is quite the opposite: it means being publicly exposed and subject to abuse. The prophet stands outside the sacred temple precincts, in the public square, totally dedicated to God's truth and justice yet horribly vulnerable to the crowd. As a threat or challenge to the people, the prophet will never be popular, while the biblical priest poses no threat and is revered from a safe distance.

Biblical *prophets* represent a fundamental shift in people's understanding of God, Providence, or the working of grace in the world. Where inexorable fate was held to control and explain events, the *oracle* served as go-between who predicted unavoidable future events. The oracle's reputation depended entirely on correct prognostications. But Israel's religious world was built on very different foundations. God, and not blind fate, reigns; and God is not implacable. Nor does God's prophet seek to foretell the inevitable and want to be proved correct; the prophet actually wants to be proven wrong, by alerting people to danger signs and the consequences of their unrepentant actions, and



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telling them that *they can change, repent and convert*, that punishment may be cancelled if the people listen and respond to grace. God has sworn an unbreakable covenant with us, but we need to listen to the prophets and to change accordingly. The contemporary world is in critical need of such prophets.

DYING EMBERS, ROARING FIRE

Fire has, not surprisingly, dominated the imagery of renewal in the church and its members, from the day of Pentecost when the Apostles were enflamed with the Spirit (Acts 2: 1-4), to Paul's advice to Timothy: "fan into a flame the gift that God has given you" (2 Tim 1:6). Since fire evokes the Holy Spirit and is a focal point of your theme, we should see where it leads us. At his own Episcopal ordination, one bishop said this:

"We all long for a Pentecostal Church, a Church in which the Spirit rules and not the letter, a Church in which understanding breaks down the fences we erect against each other. We are impatient with a Church that seems so un-Pentecostal, so narrow and fearful."^{xii} His name was Joseph Ratzinger. But that was 36 years ago, in 1977.

Twenty years later, Joan Chittister wrote an astonishingly challenging, encouraging, and hopeful book, *The Fire in These Ashes*,^{xiii} in which she urged us to rake the ashes to stir the fire beneath. But in 2012, Cardinal Martini evoked Karl Rahner's image of embers hidden under the ash, saying "I see the church today as so much ash under the embers that often I'm hit with a sense of impotence. How can we liberate the embers, and reinvigorate the fire?"^{xiv} And few weeks later, a Swiss Abbot took up the theme, deploring "the lack of courage, vision, and creativity in today's Church" – just as archbishop Ratzinger had done nearly forty years before, and exclaiming, "What's missing is the fire!"^{xv}

We want to be transformers but not to be transformed: others should do something and we are not Romero or Francis! So where is today's Romero – or Francis or Clare? It's simply no use talking about transformation as if we could cast a magic spell. The laws of transformation remain: no amount of coal will ever produce fire. Coal may glisten and rise like a mountain, but without ignition – a spark, a flame – it remains cold, impotent and dead. The Spirit of God is the fire, and it need to alight on us and our world. The Spirit is trying, but rather than kindling the flame, we seem to be



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beating it out. So how does the Spirit communicate? Very briefly, in our day, it is through the urgent call of Jesus; through the voices of women; through victims and children; through interreligious dialogue; through the call to service; and through Eucharist – an endangered species if ever there was one.

Cardinal Koenig spoke about “Rome’s lack of confidence in the Holy Spirit, which often blows outside the confines of the familiar and the institutional.” He said we need “new structures that allow the Spirit room to breathe.”^{xvi} But it’s difficult to breathe without fresh air. José Comblin said: “My hope is in the Holy Spirit; I think the third millennium will be the era of the Spirit. The Spirit is very active now, but there is an increasing conflict between the institutional church and the presence of the Spirit in people.”^{xvii} It’s now 2013 and still we wait. At the 1998 Asian Synod, a bishop from the Philippines begged the church’s *magisterium* to pay more attention to the *ministerium* of the laity. Of some of his fellow bishops he said: “Did they ever stop to think that the distrust of the laity might also be distrust of the Holy Spirit?”^{xviii} And finally, theologian Jürgen Moltmann said that patriarchal sins against women are sins against the Holy Spirit: “There is a serious risk that the church will lose women in the new century the way it lost European working-class men in the last.”^{xix} It’s already happening. So what are we waiting for?

We simply cannot do nothing. A gathering such as this should serve as a catalyst for urgent action. No one can tell anyone else what they should do, but each of us can ask ourselves what we can do, and ask our friends – and enemies – to tell us. The old story of Abba Joseph, the desert father, comes to mind:

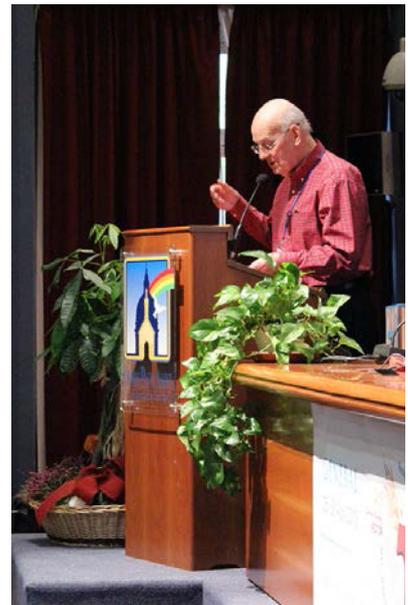
Abba Lot went to see the old man and said: “As far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, and I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?” The old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire, and he said: “If you will, you can become all flame.”

That’s transformation! Can we live with it, or is it just too much to contemplate? Is it really too big for our poor, weak shoulders? Certainly, it is not easy; but it can happen and it is most



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urgently needed. It requires that we be rooted in Christ and on fire with the Spirit (cf. Colossians 2: 6-7). Then you, I, we, can go from this place once more, as disciples who believe that, with Jesus the Christ, we can help to transform the world.



ENDNOTES

ⁱ Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol XXXVI, *Supplementary*, 1981:50.

ⁱⁱ This is essential the thesis of Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his *The Dignity of Difference* 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is a phrase from the 1990 encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. His reference to "people of different religions" surely applies to fellow-Christians. Through "the dialogue of life" people "bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society" (para. 57)

^{iv} Pedro Arrupe, SJ, 1978. Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation", in J. Aixala (ed.) *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses of Pedro Arrupe SJ*, St. Louis, 1981: 172-181.



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^v Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. 1975, para 20.

^{vi} Paul VI, *op.cit.*, para 63.

^{vii} *Loc. cit.*

^{viii} Ramsey Mc Mullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*. New Haven, CT., Yale University Press), 1984: 119.

^{ix} Francis J. Moloney, *“A Hard Saying”: The Gospel and Culture*. Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 2001: 175.

Bold italics added; everything else is author’s emphasis.

^x Selected quotations from Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi’s Mission of Peace*. Doubleday Religion, New York, 2009: 197-212.

^{xi} John Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*. Orbis, New York, 2003: 174-5.

^{xii} Quoted by J. J. Hughes in *The Tablet*, March 19, 2007: 23.

^{xiii} Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life*. Sheed and Ward, 1996.

^{xiv} John Allen, Final Interview with Cardinal Martini, *National Catholic Reporter*, September 4, 2012: NCR Today.

^{xv} Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, in *National Catholic Reporter*, December 20, 2012. “Swiss abbot makes fiery appeal for church reform”. www.ncronline.org

^{xvi} Quoted in *The Tablet*, April 3, 2004: 3.

^{xvii} José Comblin. This quotation comes from his (unpublished) address at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago In April 2000.

^{xviii} Quoted in *The Tablet*, May 2, 1998: 565.

^{xix} Jürgen Moltmann, quoted in “2001 and Beyond: Preparing the Church for the Next Millennium,” by Thomas Reese, SJ. *America*, June 21, 1997: 10-18. This quotation, page 13.