

LISTEN...WITH THE EAR OF OUR HEARTS

TO THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

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INTRODUCTION

We have reflected on listening with the ear of our hearts to the Word of God in Scriptures and in the Rule of Our Holy Father Benedict. Today we shall focus our attention on the voice of God speaking through the signs of the times, in people and in nature. I propose that we reflect on the following”

PART ONE

GOD SPEAKING IN THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES, IN PEOPLE AND IN NATURE

I. THE TRENDS IN OUR SOCIETY There are many trends in our times, I choose to discuss only those that I feel have great impact on our lives as religious.

A. GLOBALIZATION

There can be several meanings given to this world. Positively it can mean international solidarity, world citizenship, etc. However, in its original and economic sense Globalization means the integration of the economies of the whole world to the liberal capitalist market economy that is controlled by the Group of Eight. Its essential features are:

1. Borderless economy- It advocates the elimination of protective tariffs and give a free play to the market.
2. Import liberalization- This is a corollary of the borderless economy. Goods from all other countries can enter the country without much limitation This may seduce the consumers to think that it is good because then there are many choices and the competition can put down the prices. But this will also kill local industries and when they are killed people will be dependent for their basic needs on other countries and this certainly will not ensure for example food security. This is not sustainable consumption.
3. Free play of the market- This advocates less control from the state and making the market forces the main criteria of activities. This will make profit and market demand the supreme values. Everything else will be sacrificed to these—consumers, labor, etc. This does away with social and ethical concerns.
4. Privatization- All productive enterprises will be put into private hands and mostly in foreign hands. This effectively entrenches the foreign control of the economy of developing This will also put basic services such as energy, etc. into private hands which has profit as motive and therefore subsidies will have to be taken away and prices of basic services will soar.
5. Financial Capitalism- This is not capitalism of production but more financial speculation. So even production (construction) is done not to serve needs but for speculation. About one trillion dollars are circling the Globe daily in financial trading.

In spite of its promises of global development and well being, Globalization has not only widened the gap between the rich and the poor , it has actually caused global financial crisis and has contributed greatly to the destruction of the environment. In more detail Janet Bruin writes about the negative effects of globalization:

As Janet Bruin so aptly observes:

Instead of spreading wealth around, 'globalization 'and current macro-economic policies in both North and South are concentrating wealth in fewer hands. Unemployment and the number of people living in poverty are increasing in many countries. Workers are being forced

into low paying jobs and women are being forced into unsafe workplaces, into the unprotected informal economy where social security and other benefits do not apply, or into prostitution, Children are forced to leave school for work in carpet factories, farms or in the streets to help support their families, And people are forced to leave their countries in search of paid labor elsewhere, provoking an international backlash against immigrants as economic and security threats. Both migration and anti-immigrant xenophobia are expected to intensify as population pressures, unemployment, and economic disparities between countries become ever more acute.¹

Reflections of the Religious: How much have we internalized the values of globalization? If we live in the First World, do we realize that our lifestyle and comfort is at the cost of the poverty, and deprivation of Third World countries? How has consumerism penetrated into our religious life? Are we not tempted to just enjoy the comfort and security of our community life, oblivious of the sufferings of people around us? How ready are we to get out of our comfort zones ?

B. ..QUANTUM LEAP IN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Technology has radically changed the world as we know it, especially in the past 20 years or so. The Internet has expanded and drastically increased international communication. In our lifetime we have seen the rapid appearance of new gadgets from computers to cell phones of changing styles and capabilities, to I-pads, I-pods, tablets, etc. We have moved from a relatively slow pace of change to an exponential rate. The rate of technological change is estimated to double every decade.

I am sure we all have been warned about the dangers of technology. It is true people have become addicted to it (including religious) and driven by consumerism to buy the next best gadget or thing that they perceive will 'make their life so much better' and bring them so much 'happiness.'. This leads people to focus on work and money so much that they most of their time and energy pursuing it and hold it as their highest priority.. But what about inner fulfillment? What about the quality of their relationships?? Many lose sight of what really matters. Furthermore, so much is happening so fast in every part of the world, people no longer have any frame of reference within which to understand contemporary events. Life has become a blurred images passing us by.

On the other hand we cannot deny the advantages it has brought to modern living It helps businesses of all sorts in terms of efficiency and profitability. It helps everyone in general to obtain information more easily. Communication among peoples have become easier and less expensive. In some ways it has brought people closer together and facilitates solidarity actions especially in time of disasters and emergencies.

Without minimizing the caution in the use of technology we have to see its tremendous possibilities for evangelization. The Pope himself recognizes this "We give thanks to God for the presence of these powerful media which, if used by believers with the genius of faith and in

docility to the light of the Holy Spirit, can facilitate the communication of the Gospel and render the bonds of communion among ecclesial communities more effective.” (Pope John Paul II- Apostolic Letter on Social Communications.”

Reflections for the Religious: Are we aware of the quantum leap of technology especially of communication technology in our society? What uses have we made of technology to be more aware of the miseries of our brothers and sisters in the world, to be of greater help to others, to be in solidarity with suffering people. Or have we allowed it to increase our convenience, to serve as escape mechanisms, etc.?

C. CULTURE OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH

: Whenever we finish reading the daily newspaper , or listening to the news on TV, our overwhelming impression is that we are living in a very violent world. We, in fact, live in a culture of violence. There is personal and structural violence. There is economic violence, political violence, cultural violence, racial violence, religious violence gender violence, and ecological violence. We are shocked to hear of young people going into schools and shooting down their classmates. There was that terrible massacre in Norway perpetrated by a young person. A lot of movies and programs on TV are full of killings and violence. Even the computer games young people engage in are very violent making annihilation of people as basis for higher scores in the game.

It is not enough to be aware of the fact of violence. We have to understand the dynamics of violence and conflict. The root cause of violence is controlling power which is institutionalized in patriarchy and kyriarchy. Power-over is controlling power. It is the consciousness of one’s superiority over others and the desire to impose one’s will on those weaker than oneself. Power-over motivates through fear. It instills fear then offers the hope of relief in return for compliance and obedience. Disobedience is met with force and violence. There is a threat of the loss of value, sustenance, comforts and esteem. It has a clear material base and is grounded on the ability to punish by imposing physical or economic sanctions. Thus power –over is inherently related to war and conflict.

Patriarchy was originally the absolute rule of the father in early societies and denotes the oppression of women by men. This power of the strong over the weak has spread to society and to describe this, Elisabeth Fiorenza coined the term :kyriarchy. It denotes the rule of the emperor/master/lord/father/husband/ over those he has power over. This includes but goes beyond patriarchy .. Kyriarchal power operates not only along the axis of gender but also along those of race, class, culture, and religion . **Kyriarchy denotes a complex social pyramid of graduated dominations and subordinations.** Its features are: hierarchy, dominance, exploitation and oppression of “lower beings”, exclusion, segregation, discrimination, fear of the

other , use of violence. From this perspective (power over and kyriarchy), one can see that the violent conflict situations we see in the world are caused, initiated, and perpetuated to take over power, to retain power, to defend power.

Reflections for the Religious: Do we realize that there are also areas of violence in our religious community—maybe not physically, but psychologically and emotionally. Are religious exempt from addiction to power, from authoritarian mode of leadership, of subtle discrimination, and other forms of abuse of power?

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT POWER SHOULD NOT BE EXERCISED TO CONTROL, INTIMIDATE, OPPRESS OR EXPLOIT PEOPLE BUT RATHER TO EMPOWER THEM BY GIVING THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP ALL THEIR INNATE ABILITIES AND TO BRING ALL THESE TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE—THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY, THE CHURCH, SOCIETY AS A WHOLE AND YES THE CARE FOR THE WHOLE PLANET.

D.TRENDS IN THE CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

There is no doubt that there has been a crisis going on in the Catholic Church. People blame secularism which is an external factor but one cannot deny that there are internal factors that contribute to the crisis. In the West one hears of a post-Christian era. There are less and less people who want to belong to an organized Church. There is also the fact that Catholics feel conflicts in many areas of their life between their beliefs and their practice. In countries where Church going is still strong as in the Philippines, there is the question of how this continuing religiosity can be reconciled with corruption among the predominantly Catholic officials, with the unjust labor practices by predominantly Catholic landlords and managers, the prevalence of human trafficking, etc. etc. The empowerment that women have experienced in society finds no corresponding empowerment within the Church. The Church remains intransigent about the priesthood of women. Many couples are conflicted by the equally intransigent policy of the Church regarding contraception ,etc. with their inability to provide a quality of life for their children.

We have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. This great breakthrough that brought the Church to relevance in the modern world and that had brought in a breath of fresh air and a possibility of living a mature freedom within the Church has suffered a backlash. More and more conservative bishops have been appointed and there is a marked tendency to regress to the times of the Council of Trent

Added to all these is the scandal caused by sexual harassments and sexual abuse of priests of women and children. This has further eroded the credibility of the Church.

There is a corresponding crisis in vocation both to the religious life and the priesthood. In European countries, for example in Switzerland, there are not enough priests to take care of parishes and most are administered by lay people. With some exceptions seminarians. have

dwindled in number. Among religious women there is also a dearth of vocations. Congregations either close up or merge with other communities.

In spite of this situation, there remains in many people a thirst for spirituality. Many have turned to Eastern religions that offer food for their spirit. There have arisen many organizations of lay people that provide them with spiritual nourishment. The recent election of Pope Francis who is a simple holy man with a great heart for the poor has somehow restored the credibility of the Church.

Reflection for Religious- This crisis in the Church and religious life is a wake-up call that is urging Religious to leave their comfort zones and regain the original zeal of the apostles on Pentecost morning flinging doors and windows open to proclaim the good news once again using the great technological advances to embark on a new evangelization in this year of faith.

II. LISTENING TO GOD IN HIS PEOPLE

Even more than through the signs of the times, God speaks through his people. Amid the crisis in the world—economic, political, cultural and religious, people raise their voices in anguish, in despair, in supplication, in anger, in protest. What are they telling us?

A. The Poor and the Oppressed

In spite of all the technological developments, industrial breakthroughs, production of wealth, POVERTY is still the greatest global problem and the voices of the poor cry out from all corners of the world. The cause of poverty is not due to lack of resources because many countries with great natural resources are among the poorest. Because they have been exploited and oppressed. The great cause of poverty is INJUSTICE. This is what the poor are telling us. They are not asking for dole outs. They are demanding JUSTICE! We have to realize that there is direct connection between affluence of the few and the deprivation of the many. And we in the convents, in spite of our vow of poverty certainly do not belong to the poor and the oppressed. We need to reflect on the extent of our connivance, wittingly or unwittingly with the oppression of the poor.

B. THE PILGRIM PEOPLE—MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, STATELESS PEOPLE

Corollary to poverty is the exponential increase of people who have left their countries to earn a living in foreign lands or who are forced to leave their homes due to political, economic or religious oppression—people who will remain aliens in the countries where they choose to live in and suffer conscious or subtle discrimination in different degrees. Just as the Chosen People groaned in Babylon in the land of their exile, migrants, refugees, stateless people also cry out in their loneliness and their sense of not belonging. Those of us who are living in the developed countries where they have sought refuge have the obligation to acknowledge their existence in our midst, be aware of their problems and do what we can to help them find a home with us.

C. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MINORITIES

One of the most oppressed people on earth are the indigenous peoples who are the original inhabitants of their land but have been conquered, decimated, and robbed of their land by colonizers. They now live in the margins of society, their ancestral domains threatened by further exploitation, their culture and beliefs either demonized or bastardized. Multi-national corporations use divide and rule to penetrate into their domains for large-scale logging and mining which enrich the companies but further impoverish the indigenous people and leaving them with a devastated environment. Religious minorities in different lands are discriminated against, even at times persecuted. Their voices are among the weakest and many people are ignorant or oblivious of their plight. We need to tune in to them with greater effort.

D. WOMEN

In spite of the advances of the women's movement in the last century which have somehow brought about more economic and political equality in some countries, this progress inequality is not experienced by a great majority of the countries. And everywhere even with improved status, there is still prevalent many forms of violence against women—from rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dowry deaths, honor deaths, genital mutilation, infanticide, female foeticide, etc. The main victims of human trafficking are still women and children—ranging from work trafficking, sex trafficking, organ transplant trafficking, surrogate pregnancies, etc. Prostitution is a billion-dollar industry controlled by syndicates. As WOMEN RELIGIOUS, we ought to have a greater sensitivity to these issues and listen to the cries of our sisters with compassion and commitment.

E. THE ELDERLY, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, MODERN LEPERS

In this age of youth, health, and conformism, there are people who are marginalized because of age, disabilities or socially unacceptable characteristics. The elderly suffer loneliness and isolation. All that had given them self-esteem – youth, beauty, power, position, prestige have all been relegated to the past. Many are left to die alone. People with disabilities are treated as if they were retarded even if their disabilities are physical. They are dependent on others sometimes for their mobility. If the disability is psychological, their fate is even worse. There are also people, for example with sexual orientations that are not in conformity with the general norms of society (lesbians and gays) who suffer discrimination, made fun of and sometimes are deprived of jobs which they are capable of doing. Some have committed suicide because of rejection by their families. What comfort and consolation can we offer them?

F. YOUTH

With many years of their lives before them, young people should be full of zest for life. And yet we hear of suicides by very young people in their teens or twenties. Many belong to dysfunctional families that have failed to provide them with a healthy childhood, good examples and moral values. Many are confused and we know how many get into drugs, into

crimes, into meaningless lives. They cry out for love, for guidance, for a meaning in life. How do we reach their hearts, how can we take hold of their outstretched hands and guide them to responsible adulthood? They are also often victims of domestic violence of human trafficking of child abuse, of exploitation as child workers and child warriors.

III. GOD'S VOICE IN THE GROANING OF THE EARTH

All over the world we hear the news of typhoons, floods, tsunamis, tornados, etc.etc. And they are described as natural disasters. But actually although it is true that these are natural events, the devastations that come with them are human-made. We are aware that we are undergoing a global ecological crisis which has the following characteristics:

1)alteration of planetary circulations and exchange— exchanges of energy between sun and Earth are being altered with consequences for global warming and increased transmission of damaging ultraviolet radiation;

2)land degradation—cropland and food production capacity is being degraded by erosion, desertification, and salinization;

3)water quality degradation— both surfaced waters and groundwater are being polluted by agricultural chemicals and landfill leachates;

○ *4)deforestation and habitat destruction. . .*

○ *;5)species extinction and biotic alterations. . .*

○ *6) wastes and global toxification. . .;*

○ *7)human and cultural degradation—*

long standing human cultures that have lived sustainably for centuries are rapidly degraded and extinguished by non sustainable development.[1]

○ [1] Calvin B. deWitt , “ The Religious Foundations of Ecology” in Judith Scherff (ed), The Mother Earth Handbook (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1991), pp253-254.

We hear the groaning of creation in the howling of the winds blowing across deserts that used to be lush virgin forests, across barren lands that used to be fertile unspoiled by fertilizers and pesticides and by siltation. We hear the whining of the waves as they splashed through denuded mangroves and move over devastated coral reefs. We can hardly breathe in the polluted air that surround us. We hardly hear the dying sighs of species at the brink of extinction. How seriously have we responded personally and communally to the rape of our earth?

PART TWO

OUR RESPONSE AS RELIGIOUS WOMEN

After listening to and hearing the voice of God in the signs of the time, in the anguish of people, in the groaning of the earth, how can we respond?. We remember the words of Scriptures: IF YOU LISTEN TO HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS!

I think the voices we hear urge us to go deep into our hearts and learn to respond by through the mystic-prophetic nature of our religious vocation .

I.THE MYSTIC IS A PROPHET IN CONTEMPLATION

We are all called to be mystics- The first thing we have to do is TO PONDER ALL THESE THINGS IN OUR HEARTS. This requires a contemplative (mystic) reflection.

There seems to be quite a lot of confused notions and outright misconceptions about the word “MYSTIC”. People tend to identify it with visions, stigmata or such extraordinary phenomenon.(maybe this could be termed Mystic with a capital M). I will be talking about mystic with a small m.) Ronda la Rue defines a mystic as” one who, above all else in life desires to know (*not* in the intellectual sense of knowing) the deepest Truth of existence “Ursula describes the mystic further: “The story of the Christian mystics is one of an all-consuming, passionate love affair between human beings and God. It speaks of the yearning, a burning desire for the contemplation and presence of the divine..Mystics seek participation in divine life, communion and union with God.This yearning is candle by the fire of divine love itself, which moves the mystics in their search and leads him/her, often arduous journeys, to discover and proclaimed the all-encompassing love of God for humankind “

Some characteristics of the mystic or mystical experience are the following:

- 1.there is a spiritual journey that leads to a new consciousness—an awakening.
- 2. one is alone in embarking on this journey and each one’s experience is unique
- 3. one goes through a desert experience (dark night of the soul) that results in a shift of consciousness and overturning of one’s old life patterns
- 4. one’s experience is beyond words .
- 5. This intimacy with God is above all a GIFT
- 6. The mystic somehow inspires and transforms others by their lives.

The key elements that make up the atmosphere that enables the mystic to ponder things in her heart are: SILENCE, SOLITUDE, ASCETICISM

SILENCE:

The first pre-requisite to a contemplative reflection is silence—not the negative silence of resentment, passive aggression or cowardice but the positive silence of mind, heart, emotions that prepares one heart to hear the voice of God in . This is so important in our world of noise and information overload. Perhaps our convents are oasis of silence but even in these places, even in the midst of physical silence, we can have raging storms in our thoughts and in our emotions. We can be replaying disturbing scenes where our ego was hurt, we can be preparing what we could have answered, what we would do to make revenge, etc. etc. So it must be a silence of one's whole being.

SOLITUDE

It is sometimes necessary to withdraw ourselves from human company to be attentive to what is going on in our own hearts. But we must make a difference between solitude and loneliness.

Loneliness is something that happens to us—imposed externally, solitude is our choice.

"Loneliness is a negative state, marked by a sense of isolation. One feels that something is missing. It is possible to be with people and still feel lonely—perhaps the most bitter form of loneliness .Solitude is the state of being alone without being lonely. It is a positive and constructive state of engagement with oneself. Solitude is a time that can be used for reflection, inner searching or growth or enjoyment of some kind." (Internet: Psychology today.) Deep reading requires solitude, so does experiencing the beauty of nature, and the significance of things we see or events we experience. It is the ideal state of hearing what God is telling us through nature, and through the anguished cry of God's people.

ASCETICISM

This term has somehow fallen into disrepute because it has been misunderstood as severe or even injurious practices done to the body to attain sanctity. But actually the word "asceticism" comes from the Greek askesis which means practice—bodily exercise usually attributed to athletic training in the Olympic games. The early Christians adopted it to signify the practice of the spiritual exercises to strengthen one's spiritual muscles or to acquire habits of virtue. Genuine mysticism cannot exist without some form of asceticism although ascetics need not be mystics. It is necessary for pondering things in one's heart because the clamor of egoistic interests can easily drown the voice of God. So it is a form of mindfulness and focus.

GENUINE MYSTICISM LEADS TO PROPHECY

In contemplative prayer, according to Merton, we pass through the center of our own being into the very being of God where we see ourselves and our world with a clarity, a simplicity, a truthfulness that is not available in any other way. And it is this view of reality which urges the contemplative to respond concretely to anguished voices she has heard. For the religious,

celibate solitude has as its primary purpose the fostering of such contemplation within which the religious participates in the divine perspective from which prophecy arises.

I. A PROPHET IS A MYSTIC IN ACTION

Like the word “mystic”, the word “prophet” is also largely misunderstood. It does not mean being able to tell the future. It does not mean going about proclaiming the end of the world, etc. According to Fr. Lombardi, “What is a prophet? What is a prophetic act? Simply put: Stand up, speak out. Use words if necessary. Let Jesus use you to be His instrument to challenge dominant forces.” That's what the prophets of the Bible did—they stood up, spoke out. According to Rev. Slyde Moran, the biblical prophets had three kinds of messages:

- Edification: (building up of the people by way instruction in righteousness)
- Exhortation: (Warnings and Admonishment to Obey the Lord)
- Comfort: (Encouragement to be strong and courageous and to Trust in the Lord)

Much of the criticism of the prophets was leveled at the powerful, most often also the religious leaders, who used their power and influence for selfish or sinful purposes a) for their failure to be spiritual leaders). The prophets were a balance to the unrestrained power of the monarchy and the aristocracy. But they also spoke for the weak, the oppressed, the disenfranchised, those who had little voice in shaping their own lives or their own future. The characteristics of prophets are the following:

- They have a vision or a sense of calling (they announce the good news)
- They speak out against injustice, bigotry, false religiosity. They disturb the status quo (they denounce the bad news)
- They act in spite of fear
- They are not “team players” but are usually a voice crying in the wilderness.
- They speak out of love not out of arrogance
- They are usually beheaded physically or symbolically

Now that we have clarified the terms “mystics” and “prophets”, I can go on to say that in my opinion this is our response to the voice of God we heard in the signs of the time, in peoples, and in nature; **TO FULFILL THE MYSTIC-PROPHETIC ESSENCE OF OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE.**

Concretely, we have to share experiences how this can actually be done. At his point I have to cite actual efforts of religious to do this and the best way I think is to share with you my own experience in the context of my country, the Philippines.

OUR STORY:

1. Involvement in the Political Struggle

The Philippines was a colony of Spain for 400 years, of the USA for 50 years and was under Japanese occupation for 3 years. After we won our independence from Spain in 1898 and from the US in 1946, we enjoyed a brief period of democracy until we were put under Martial Law by the dictator Ferdinand Marcos. So ours is a history of struggle and resistance against colonialism and oppression. This is the background of my involvement in the political struggle. After 6 years in Europe earning my degree of Doctor of Philosophy major in Linguistic Analysis, I came home to a Philippines under Martial Law. Amid political and economic repression of my people, I became a political activist. I remember my baptism of fire. There was a strike in a wine factory and there was a telephone brigade among Sisters and Priests to go to the strike area so that the workers will not be harmed because the military threatened to arrest them. It was 11 o'clock at night and since my superior was already asleep, I wrote her a love letter: *Dear Sr. Catherine: I am going to the La Tondena strike, I don't know when I will be back, Love, Sr. Mary John.* Then I went with the Sisters to the strike area where I witnessed for the first time military brutality. The workers with whom we linked arms were beaten up, pushed into military buses and brought to the detention camps. Right there and then we formed the Friends of the Workers and committed ourselves to the workers' cause. That started a life for me which people in my country call the parliament of the streets.

The moment one got involved with the workers, one had also to get involved with the urban poor because the workers live in slums. So that was when we had to fight against the demolition campaigns of Imelda Marcos. We used to make human barricades. The women used to put all the saints on the streets: Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, etc. and then the next row would be the pregnant women and then the sisters and children. Of course, the bulldozers did not dare run over "Our Lady of Fatima," etc. so that was how we saved the houses! It is a long story. All of a sudden these sisters who were inside the cloister were all out in the streets. And we went through a spiritual crisis because people were asking: "Are these still Sisters? How come they are out in the streets? How come they are talking about just wages?" etc. But at this time we had started rethinking our theology. We started talking about "integral salvation." There is no soul that is saved without the body. So if there is an obstacle to the well being of the persons, then we have to be there, if we are what we call Christians who are taking seriously Jesus' message. That was our spiritual rationalization, if you want. But that is the way we were inspired. If we truly are followers of Christ, then we should do everything for the good of the people who are made up of body and soul. If we are nuns, who are supposed to be radical Christians, we should be there where people are. So that is how I got socially and politically involved.

I started to give speeches on top of a 10-wheeler truck to tell people not to pay price-hike for the oil because it was going to be for the good of the Caltex and Shell companies but detrimental to the poor people who have to pay higher prices for basic commodities. I remember a policeman once came to me to say: "Why don't you talk about mortal sin and hell and purgatory, why are you talking

about oil price-hike, you are a sister aren't you? Shouldn't you be primarily concerned with the soul?" I replied with a question: "Why, do you see any souls walking about?" I said: "Well, as a Christian, I think I ought to talk about what is good for the body and soul of the human being and not only for the soul." We realized all of a sudden, that we now had a greater reason to be Christians and a greater reason to be Religious because we were really involved with the struggle of the people. So that was a far cry from the kind of training that I had, which was to be in the chapel praying, and not to be concerned very much about what happens to the body, because if people suffered more and more, then they would have a greater place in heaven. That is the kind of theology that we transcended. Because of this I became a member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and became its Secretary General for 6 years from 1996-2001.

Much later we were confronted by the destruction of our environment through the incursion of multi-national corporations that went into mining and logging which reduced our virgin forest to 8% of its original coverage of the island before the conquest of Spain. Together with the indigenous peoples who lost their ancestral domain because of these activities, nuns and priests joined in the struggle to protect our environment through education, protest rallies, sound ecological practices and world-wide networking.

2. Pioneering in Women Empowerment

How did I get into the women's movement? I realized, after sometime, that you couldn't talk about total social transformation without concerning oneself with the particular oppression of one half of society, namely of the women. So we realized that the gender issue is an integral part in this social orientation. That is when I got involved with the women's movement and finally I was elected Chairperson of GABRIELA, which is a federation with 50,000 members and 200 women organizations. We organized women according to sectors, interests and whatever issues could unite women, because we felt that without organization, we would have no power to make changes. We learned to mobilize our members around issues such as violence against women, sex trafficking, etc. We spearheaded national and even international campaigns as for example the one for Sara Balabagan and Flor Contemplacion. We set up education desks to awaken awareness among the grassroots women. We lobbied for women friendly laws and through our efforts laws against sex trafficking, domestic violence, sexual harassment were passed. We involved ourselves in crisis interventions and I helped found the Women Crisis Center for women victims of violence. We put up temporary shelters for women and children. We initiated international solidarity exposure programs and seminars for women in the different parts of the world to get an understanding of the issues and struggles of Filipino women.

As Dean of College, I introduced Women's Studies at St. Scholastica's College which became a part of the General Education required for graduation. In 1988, I founded the Institute of Women's Studies that provided non-degree courses for women not only of the Philippines, but of Asia-Pacific and even Africa. The Institute was the first to publish feminist books in the Philippines, built up an extensive collection of women's books and documents in its Resource Center and developed a Women and Ecology Wholeness Farm to develop Ecofeminism in the Philippines. For some years, the Institute

had a Radio Program to reach more women. The Institute has recently developed a consultancy program that offers two special modules: Gender Sensitivity for Men and Gender –fair Educationn

3. Involvement in Ecumenism and Inter-faith Dialogue in Developing a Liberating Theology and Spirituality

My involvement with the struggle of our people started to re-shape my theology and spirituality. I remember that after several years of socio-political involvement, some of us Sisters and Priests who were in this struggle suffered a spiritual crisis. In working closely with the people, a lot of our absolute principles became relativized. We began to see many of our concepts and practices both in the Church and in the convent as irrelevant, but we still did not know what should take their place or if something should take their place at all. So thirty of us went on a 5 day retreat to clarify to ourselves our new understanding of Christianity and our new understanding of being Religious. We found a new understanding of our being Christians based on our conviction of Christ's option for the poor. We got a new understanding of faith which is no longer security of being saved because we were law-abiding citizens in the Church and in our Congregations but we understood faith now as a total openness to the radically new that God would demand of us every day. So faith is a risk , not a security.

We gained a new understanding of our vows and how we could put them at the service of our people. Little by little we were developing concepts and practices that would later on be systematized into a Theology of Struggle. And if there is one characteristic of the spirituality that came with this theology, it is that of BEING PROPHETIC! We realized that we had to mirror in ourselves and in our lives the characteristics of THE REIGN OF GOD—the love, compassion, the joy that Christ promised. But side by side with this we felt we had to denounce whatever is an obstacle to the fulfillment of this Reign of God—structures of injustice—economic, political and social , even if it would mean inconvenience, misunderstanding and even danger to our lives.

Finally I got involved in feminist theology because the moment we started to reflect on why women are oppressed (and we are 85% Catholics in the Philippines) we realized that one great social conditioning is religion. That is what pushed us sisters to go into feminist theology, and I believe that the task of theology are two: one is to deconstruct what ever is oppressive, and then to reconstruct what is liberating in religion. Together with other women members of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, we developed a Feminist Theology of Liberation from the perspective of Third World women which also led us to develop an empowering and liberating spirituality of passion and compassion.

It became clear to us that although it was true that we had religious experiences during our political actions, we needed moments of solitude, distance, contemplation not only to replenish our energies but also to catch ourselves in our self-deceptions and our self-righteousness. It was not a surprise that when the first Christian Zendo was opened in the city, many of those who went there to sit in Zazen were activists.

Personally, my discovery of oriental spirituality was like a completion of my being. I was like a fish that found its stream. I actually first got in contact with Zen when I was student in Rome and Fr Enomiya La Salle who became a Zen teacher in Japan, gave us a three day Zen retreat where we sat 45 minutes, seven times a day . Although I did not pursue it ,because at that time there was no Zen center in Rome, it was what saved my sanity when about 15 years later when I was in Spain to open a migrant center for Filipinos there, I experienced a spiritual crisis where I simply could not relate with a “God with a face”. I felt at that time that I had all along been creating God to my own image and likeness and to rationalize everything I wanted to do including engaging in political activism. I resolved to let God be and the only way I could do that was to learn how to pray without thinking, to remain empty of words and images , , to be just present to the PRESENCE. And that was what Zen was all about.

Later on I got acquainted with Syddha Yoga which gave me another aspect of contemplation—a certain kind of lightness of being, an element of joy which I did not find in Zen. I learned to “dance with the playful consciousness of God!” Ironically, through oriental spirituality I got a greater appreciation of the contemplative legacy of my Catholic Faith in St’ Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart.

CONCLUSION

Today I and other religious women are as committed as ever to the cause of economic justice, gender equality and ecological preservation. We have continued to engage in inter-religious dialogue and in helping to develop a culture of peace . And in all these endeavors which seem sometimes to be going nowhere or to be having no fundamental changes, or suffering backlash—we are buoyed up by our moments of contemplation and solitude which make us continue to live in HOPE.As we continue to listen to God’s voice in the signs of the times , in people and in nature, and in trying to respond to the urgent call, more and more I am convinced that **A MYSTIC IS A PROPHET IN CONTEMPLATION AND A PROPHET IS A MYSTIC IN ACTION!**