

CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

ON OUR RESURRECTIONIST IDENTITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE YEAR
OF CONSECRATED LIFE



ROME 2015

On cover: Window from the Resurrection Parish Church in Kościerzyna,
Poland.

Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, I, 1)*

Dear Brothers,

The celebration of the current Year of Consecrated Life on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* and the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae caritatis*, obliges me to invite you to a shared reflection on our Resurrectionist identity. Inevitably the basis of this reflection, both individual and collective, must be an historical perspective on the origins

* Francis, *Apostolic Letter to Consecrated Persons on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, November 21, 2014

of the Congregation, on its growth and development. Therefore – as stated by Pope Francis – “More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders [...] and the first communities” (*Apostolic Letter*, I, 1).

Following these lines, I would like this letter to provoke or to revive conversation and discussion on our *identitas*, which requires “a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord; docility to His Spirit; intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times; the will to be part of the Church” (*Mutuae relationes* [1978], 12).

1. ONE WHO IS CONVERTED, CONVERTING OTHERS

Everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, I, 1)

It is no secret that our Founder, Servant of God Bogdan Jański (1807–1840), as a young man tumbled to the moral depths and, from that place, touched by God’s grace, decided to change his life absolutely into “a truly Christian one” (*Diary*, p. 320) and to set out for the heights of holiness. At the same time, he was aware that

the basis for a spiritual awakening lay not in his extraordinary effort and desire to improve himself, but rather in the action of God. He humbly confesses: “This was your wish, O merciful God! Your grace accomplished this, not any merit, work or reasoning of mine” (*Diary*, p. 161). The sacramental culmination of his conversion in confession and Holy Communion was without doubt the festive turning point for him: “A day in my life which will always be solemn! A day of a new covenant with God!” (*Diary*, p. 166); but it is also – and perhaps most importantly – a point of reference for continuous and constant conversion, the effect of which is “an entirely new life, truly Christian, devout, humble, charitable – poor, temperate, hard-working” (*Diary*, p. 329-330). Having a heightened awareness of his sinfulness and selfishness, and at the same time feeling the need for, and the importance of, God’s mercy, he would be on this road for the rest of his days.

Our saintly Founder, filled with the grace of conversion, felt called to bring others of his companions from their spiritual misery to the Church. In this apostolate, while making use of countless encounters and conversations, books and periodicals, letters and “scribbled notes”, he did not forget also to pray for those he was helping. The motto of these activities may be expressed in his written resolution: “In all relationships with people to seek with all my soul their conversion to God. And to place myself so low [...] so as to divert others’ attention from myself” (ACRR 8563/336).

Should we, as spiritual sons of Bogdan Jański, knowing that conversion is a lifelong process (cf. *Constitutions* 1), better cultivate the need to order our affections, will and mind? Should we not seek out more those who are lost, injured or disillusioned, showing them the character and the way of our Founder? Should we not pray more often and more fervently for his elevation to the altars, that he might intercede for the renewal and consolidation of relationships with God and people?

2. FROM THE HOMELAND TO A FOREIGN LAND

The Year of Consecrated Life challenges us to examine our fidelity to the mission entrusted to us.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, I, 2)

Major historical events determined that the birthplace of a Congregation founded by Poles would be the capital of France – Paris. And so, not only Bogdan Jański, Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz, but the whole founding generation (Joseph Hube, Alexander Jełowicki, Charles Kaczanowski, Eugene and Louis Funcken, Vincent Barzynski), left their homeland and found themselves *de facto* in a land foreign to them, yet actually friendly and hospitable. As a matter of fact, none of the first Resurrectionists was working in his own country. All of them, willing to go to the ends of the earth,

magnanimously set off to where they were sent. Overcome with apostolic zeal, they brought the Gospel of hope and pastoral care, organizing structures and communities of faith, and creating charitable, educational and pedagogical institutions. From the very beginning they were particularly interested in cooperation with the laity and their formation, as well as vocational education and preparation of good pastors.

As religious they were always, moreover, taking the lead in carrying the faith to others and forming new ecclesial communities, since “the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life” (*Vita consecrata*, 25). The sense of mission means a readiness to go out, to serve, to bear witness, to proclaim Christ, to spread Christian culture, to do the work of charity, to be in solidarity with the poor.

Shouldn't this symptomatic fact of the history of our Congregation renew in us a fundamental willingness to obey those who have the authority to send us in the name of Christ?! Should this not inspire us to a greater sensitivity to the thinking of God, to an openness to new horizons?! Shouldn't we be more trusting in the Holy Spirit, who wants to continue to do great things with us?!

3. FOR THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic kairos, a time rich in God's grace, a time of transformation.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, II, 5)

Almost all of the first Resurrectionists came out of the widespread uprising of the libertarian-nationalist movements, and in exile they came straight into the middle of a feverish political-revolutionary life. Despite this, they tried to establish boundaries between the world and their cloistered space. They also took care to be above the divisions and not to associate themselves with any political party. Bogdan Jański had already in one of his letters made “a most solemn declaration”: “We do not belong to any political party, nor do we find ourselves in any legal action from one; neither do we have any particular humane affiliation. Only in Christ the Lord, in His divine teaching and in His holy Church is everything for us!” (ACRR 8541/275–276). This statement appears also in other records: “I repeat, do not place us in line with the parties, especially me [...] We advise all of his people and those close to him not to enter into any political party, neither democratic nor aristocratic, because in both of them the old inspiration, non-Christian ways

of thinking, hold sway” (Letter to Valery Wielogłowski, PAN Library in Cracow, sygn. 1835, k. 11-12).

Recalling these events, we think about the experience of “the tension between secularism and an authentic life of faith, between the fragility of humanity itself and the power of grace” (*Starting afresh from Christ*, 12). On the one hand, to preserve our identity, we must not resemble the world; on the other, to be faithful to the mission of Christ, we must go out to the world and listen carefully to its voices. This means that we must be sensitive to the ills and needs of the world; we must seek answers from the spirit of the Gospel to the ever new questions which arise around us.

Isn't it necessary that our life and our words proclaim more convincingly the Gospel values of poverty, chastity and service, as an antidote to the perennial three-fold concupiscence: the greed for wealth, lust for pleasure and idolatrous cult of power? Do we remember to open ourselves to the world, to protect “that *space in the heart* where every person is called to union with the Lord”? (*Vita consecrata*, 59). Should we not often do an audit of the quality and content of our preaching and teaching?

4. IN THE CHURCH AND FOR THE CHURCH

No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, II, 3)

Bogdan Jański, having returned to the fold of the Catholic Church, patiently formed an ecclesial sensibility in his disciples. Unfortunately the political context did not favor this, since the November Uprising was condemned by Pope Gregory XVI in 1832, whereupon the trust of the Poles in the Holy See was severely weakened. This whole time Jański was thinking: “We are still not sufficiently attached to Christ, to the Pope, to the unity of Catholics, which in the event of a conflict we might undo” (*Diary*, p. 597). In the name of this concern for unity he formulated on Pentecost Sunday, 1839, the following inspired, detailed norm: “A good Catholic listens to the Pope even in non-dogmatic matters, and even if the command was not as it should be. Nothing should be done against this command until it is recalled, or unless there is a special permission” (*Diary*, p. 475). This type of formation bore immediate fruit in the form of a specific service for the ministry of unity. Semenenko and Kajsiwicz even as seminarians informed Rome concerning the state of the Church under occupation, and over the years became

unofficial “ambassadors” of Church affairs in Poland and the East. Fr. Peter Semenenko with his special talents enjoyed teaching authority and was eagerly engaged in the work of the dicasteries and prestigious bodies of the Vatican. This activity of the Resurrectionists of that time received wide coverage on Polish soil, as was noted by one of the more active external brothers at the time, Valery Wielogłowski: “Everyone seeks them out as our advocates before the Holy See and views them as a model of priesthood – we might say that through them Rome was revived for us [...]. With joy we learn that our beloved Pope takes an interest in us and intercedes for us in his holy prayers” (Letter of September 6, 1847).

Recalling with pride that commitment, we realize that “as members of the Congregation we are religious in the Church and for the Church” (Constitutions, 11). This means that another distinguishing characteristic of our identity is a *sentire cum Ecclesia*, “obedience to our bishops, especially to the Roman pontiff”, a fruitful and harmonious collaboration in the particular churches, among the various institutes of consecrated life and with the laity. This significant role stems from the fact that the Church wants us as religious to be true experts of communion, living daily by this spirituality (cf. *Vita consecrata*, 46-49).

Shouldn't we feel more responsible for the Church and love her more and more – such as she is? Should we not with greater courage go beyond the boundaries of our Congregation to carry out apostolic projects in a collaborative manner? Are we in communion with others, are we open to dialogue, to listening and mutual assistance?

5. WITH PASSION EVERY DAY

We have to ask ourselves [...] whether the Gospel is truly the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, I, 2)

Our Founders, despite difficult material conditions and obstacles along the road of their vocation, were zealous enthusiasts of the things of God: with passion they gained knowledge, with generosity and sensitivity they charitably went out to help, with patience they built up the community, with fervor they proclaimed Christ. Fascinated by the opportunities that come with the Sacrament of the Priesthood, they wanted to set out as quickly as possible, with hearts full of zeal and enthusiasm, to work in the Lord’s vineyard: “God is now loosening our hands for work. Let us lift up our spirit to Him. Let us purify our intentions, let them be clear as the light of day before His sight. Let our breast raise only His love in our hearts, only the good of the brothers, only that which is good!” (Peter Semenenko, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 339). In the name of Jesus’ mandate: “Go into all the world” (Mk 16: 15), they crossed the boundaries of peoples, languages, cultures, faiths and religions.

Living the present with passion is above all to admire ever more deeply Christ and humanity, and to listen carefully to what the Holy Spirit is saying today. He

tells us what he has always said: to live radically and sincerely, to have in oneself the same feelings as Jesus, and to go out into the world with courage. People filled with the power of the Holy Spirit are not afraid of risk, do not withdraw to positions of safety, do not hide behind the screen of legalism, but rather take the challenge boldly and confidently, bearing witness with humility and joy to God, who loved us first. For “the imagination of love” knows no boundaries and can open many new ways to bring humanity into the atmosphere of the Gospel.

Should not we, who – as the Founders did – stepped onto the path of evangelical radicalism, put more effort into clinging fully to Christ, in order to be able to say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20)? Are we capable of empathizing with the situation of another person, so as to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (cf. Rom. 12:15)? Does being a Resurrectionist bring us joy, happiness and fulfillment?

6. WITH HOPE FOR TOMORROW

You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.

(Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, II, 4)

Recalling the above historical context, which is the basis of our identity, we cannot remain in our today, in order to arrive hopefully at tomorrow. The present – viewed

with purely human eyes – does not inspire too much optimism. Together with other consecrated persons, we feel the drop in vocations and the aging of the community. We have thus seen ourselves obliged to resign from running some apostolates, and we have lost others as a result of socio-political changes. Our apostolic power has been weakened, and in some cases also our credibility, by personal frustrations and disappointments, by scandals caused by personal weakness and a lack of fidelity, by rampant individualism and looking for success and personal fulfillment at any cost. We are all in some way affected or even wounded by a contemporary culture marked by liberalism, consumerism, relativism, selfism, a virtual world, information technology, mass media, electronic speed, pleasure, entertainment and the cult of the body.

On the other hand – looking with the eyes of faith – we see many signs of hope, which is “not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 *Tim* 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (*Lk* 1:37) (Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, I, 3); whom we have adopted as our model, living in ever greater unity with Him (cf. *Constitutions*, 5). The awareness of the presence of the Risen Lord moves us to look with his eyes upon the entire complex reality in which we happen to live today.

to consider as His gift the entire complex of the present in which we happen to live, and – it seems – to see it more sharply, more clearly, deeply and critically. We want to rely more on his help and support than on our

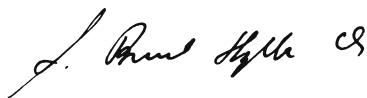
own strength that will always be too small in relation to the expectations and tasks before us. This insufficiency opens us to a genuine cooperation with the laity, which is so clearly inscribed in our history. In community life we strive for a better balance between the institution and the brotherhood, between common life and personal life, between the spiritual and apostolic life. Despite the modesty of human and material resources, we are trying to put down roots on African soil, where our brothers are working with enthusiasm and reaping the first fruits of the mission in Tanzania. Probably each of us recognizes other elements that bring hope for the future in the Provinces and the Region.

In conclusion, we cannot but ask ourselves the following questions: Do we think that for us – for a new generation – others will come; and will we try to transmit to them the resources of our heritage, a healthy tradition, our specific spirituality and the Resurrectionist spirit? Is it still possible that we, “little flock” that we are, may consider ourselves prophets, able to penetrate the history in which we live, and to interpret in a spirit of faith the events in which we have participated? How do we experience each day in a very concrete manner (individually and communally) our fundamental task of being a good leaven, an evangelical ferment, a prophetic sign in the Church and the world?

This circular is a modest complement to the Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life, in which Pope Francis repeatedly encourages us to pose important questions. Following his lead, I have also tried to touch questions concerning our reality. I would be delighted if the brothers would seek to answer them both in the “little room of the heart” as well as during community meetings.

Together with Pope Francis, I entrust all our affairs to the Mother of God, Our Lady of Mentorella, full of grace and mercy, “the Virgin Mary, listening and contemplating, the first disciple of her beloved Son” (Francis, *Apostolic Letter*, III, 5). Let us look to her, trust her Son, the Risen Lord, and through her hands make ourselves available to Him – without reservation – ourselves, our talents and our future!

In Christo Redivivo,



(Very Rev.) Bernard Hylla CR
Superior General



Rome, September 15, 2015, Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows