

AFTER THE VISION...WHAT SHALL WE DO?

“Now when their heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’” (Acts 2:37)

Introduction:

--I have been invited to offer a few reflections at the beginning of this Leadership Day. I do not speak as an expert (i.e., expert = a drip under pressure) but as a fellow traveler on our Passionist vision quest. Like many of you—in fact, perhaps, all of you--I was called unexpectedly to the service of administrative leadership—for one term as the superior of St. Vincent Strambi and for 23 years as president of CTU, one of our corporate ministries as a Passionist province. I have also been blessed to have been assigned many years ago now to teach Scripture which I have done for 46 years up to the present time. As you can understand, by habit of mind I turn to the Scriptures in addressing most topics.

It’s out of that experience of administration and reflecting on the Scriptures, and the realization of my own limits, that I speak to you today as a brother Passionist, hoping that my reflections will be of some use in the work we have ahead of us as a Passionist province.

I. Visioning, Mission articulation, and Planning as Christian Action:

--In first part today, I ask you to recall with me how the work of crafting a vision for the future, of articulating our mission, and of planning, are all deeply imbedded in the Scriptures and in our Christian tradition.

a) Biblical view of time as linear not cyclic: protology and eschatology. We will be most ourselves at the end of time, reflecting God’s will for us.

b) Christian ethics: “realized eschatology,” “living now by the future we most earnestly desire to see,” “becoming what you are.”

c) “Mission,” as stated here, clearly and succinctly states the ultimate purpose of an institution or community; “Visioning” is a way of trying to further articulate the desired future that will flow from that mission: what is it that God wills us to be? “Planning” is identifying the proper course of concerted efforts that lead us toward our desired vision and enables us, with God’s provident grace, to make it realized.

d) Mission, mission, and planning. Planning is the articulation of the intelligible and achievable means to carry out our mission, identifying the necessary adaptations to keep that mission alive and compelling, and locating the personal and financial resources needed. The mission must be articulated (i.e., put into agreed-upon words) and shared by all involved. Planning must engage the commitment, resources, and energy of all who share the mission.

e) Mission, planning, and the discipline to accept and deal with uninvited and sometimes unwelcome realities. No plan can envisage all that will happen; but planning helps a community or institution be ready to adapt when unexpected things happen.

II. Hunches About the Visioning and Planning of Holy Cross Province.

--In this part I am throwing myself on your mercy. I am not authorized to make any recommendations for our future, much less to give any directives. This is called “free fall.” But I thought it might help make more concrete the material I presented in part I about visioning, mission, and planning. So here goes...

1. I am assuming that the level of visioning and planning we are embarking on is first of all on the province level; adaptations would have to be made on each local level. I think this is an important distinction, as I will suggest further on.

2. We need at this point to put into accepted writing exactly what the vision for the province is. To stay too long on the level of a more diffused and extensive articulation, without the discipline and hard work of agreeing on a succinct common text, will, I fear, delay our work and make us weary of it.

3. I do not think we need to spend a lot of time on a “mission statement” as such. As Passionists, we already have articulated for us what our core mission as Passionists is:

*“Recognizing in Saint Paul of the Cross the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church with her supreme authority approved our Congregation and its Rule, and **entrusted us with a mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.**”* [emphasis mine] **Constitutions**, par. #2.

I really think this is enough of a mission statement for us: *to proclaim the Passion by our life and our apostolate*; it is all there. If we wanted to, we could relate this specific mission entrusted to us by the Church to the broader mission of Jesus and the New Testament.

4. What we don’t have at the moment is an articulated vision of what is needed--in the present circumstances and in view of our anticipated future--to carry out this mission entrusted to us. That is why, I believe, we have been doing this work these last few years leading to the Chapter we just had.

5. To move from “visioning” to “mission” and action planning, I think our first step is nail down—succinctly and in agreed-upon writing--what our vision is, that is, what are those elements implicit in our Passionist mission we need to address now. I think we have identified them through our process, but their articulation is currently too verbose and too diffused, in my opinion. Based on our discussions at the chapter, I believe the elements of such a vision statement involve: (1) a deeper appreciation of our shared charism as Passionists; (2) an invigoration of our local communities in the spirit of the General chapter: as mission-oriented covenant communities involving each person; as schools of humanity; and as schools of prayer; (3) a deeper bond at the local and provincial level with our lay sisters and brothers called to share our charism; (4) Openness to adapting our various ministries to better express our Passionist charism and in a manner that deals prudently with our personal and financial resources.

6. With our official Passionist mission statement already in hand, and with an agreed-upon shared Province wide-vision statement, then the provincial administration as well as each

local community can be asked to spell out in detail the steps they will take to adapt their life and ministry to this articulated vision, that is, how they will develop a strategic plan. These strategic action plans articulated both by the central provincial administration and each local community are not to be set in stone but should be shared throughout the province for mutual information and inspiration, and reviewed and adapted as needed on a regular (yearly?) basis.

7. A final word about leadership and its role in this process. I have experienced that leaders, such as local superiors or at the provincial level, have two important “powers” available to them that others of us do not when it comes to planning. One is the power to “convene”. Only leaders are legitimately able to call the community together around a common task. The other power is proper “speech”—the leader is able at the outset to frame the issue in its proper and constructive way by the manner in which it is presented and described. Will local communities actually come together to plan? Will the work of planning be seen as a vital responsibility for the sake of our future? Or will people fail to meet and describe planning as “word-smithing” or a waste of time? Leaders have the power to lead communities in the right path.

Conclusion:

There are a number of valid methodologies for planning but what is central and indispensable is that in order to keep alive, the key members of an institution or community need from time to time set down together and think through the adapted changes that need to be made to carry forward their shared mission. That, I believe, is where we as a province should now put our energy for the sake of our mission in the Church.

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