1. Evolutionary Zeal and Merciful Love in an unfolding Universe

In the book, “Also... I vow Zeal...”, we read that St. Mary Euphrasia took the vow of Zeal from St. John Eudes and “augumented the gift of the vow by adding her own insights and direct experience. Her legacy is characterized by her unique world-wide zeal.” Zeal is not static. Our charism is not static, and down through the years the charism has moved, adapted and opened. St. Mary Euphrasia brought the charism into a wider perspective. In our time together, we are going to stretch it …and look at zeal in an evolutionary universe unfolding in us individually and together.

The image of tincture can be helpful in looking at charism. A tincture comes about when herbs are placed in alcohol in order to extract the essence of the herb. An essence has a healing property. A small piece can do a lot in a large body. “What is the tincture of the Good Shepherd, what is our essence? What is our distinct quality of aliveness? Imagine a bottle representing the Good Shepherd. If we took this out for the world and we said “this is Good Shepherd energy and essence for the world, what would it be? We might be saying:” it is Zeal; Shepherding; Merciful Love, Healing, Reconciliation…

In a universe that is evolving, our essence is not stale; it is alive; dynamic and the essence and the tincture have infinite capacity. In Constitution 7 we say: “while the essential content of our mission is unchanging, the outward form should be dynamic and evolving.”

The poet Rumi says that true lovers do not find each other, they have been inside one another from the beginning. Each of us has had the essence of St. Mary Euphrasia inside us, then we found each other and we carry the St. Mary Euphrasia essence in Good Shepherd. No one can ever remove the essence; it is so deep and potent. In coming together in the essence, our country of origin does not matter … because that is a surface difference. But, when we come to the depth, we come to the essence which is pure love and overcomes boundaries.

The essence is made more potent by coming together. It is soft, fluid, able to influence and be influenced. St. Mary Euphrasia in her Conferences was very strong on the unity of our essence: "Dear Sisters, Do you know what draws down God’s special protection, and upholds the congregation and gives us strength? It is the unity between us. Should the spirit of unity in the essence every fail, our work will disappear and our congregation will become like a tree with withered leaves. For mercy’s sake keep the unity, pass on the essence to further generations, so that our congregation will be like a tree by running waters.... “

We can take a candle as a symbol. St. Mary Euphrasia said, “when I see the little lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament, I am envious, because I would like to be a light at the Lord’s feet”. The flame is a symbol of our zeal.

Feel inside yourself. What does it mean to join your essence, your tincture with the tincture of the Congregation? Why am I here, not so much on the surface, but deep down? What does God want of me? Where is God calling me for the Congregation, for the world?

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1 Studies on Good Shepherd Heritage “Also I Vow Zeal” by Sr. Rose-Virginie Varnig RGS, (Columbus, Ohio: United Printing, 1986), p.3
Exercise:
Close your eyes. Breathe. Remember. Tincture… St. Mary Euphrasia … zeal… potency …
Together.
Why are you here?
Finish the sentence: “I am here because…”
You may like to share your responses with another or in small groups.

We hope to go deeper and deeper together.
It is not so important to present intellectual ideas. What is more important is that we begin to
deepen the essence. Try to swim in the essence. See how God wants to enliven the essence and
bring it forward together beyond boundaries, for the Congregation, the church, for the world, for the
cosmos and the universe.

We want to explore: “What does it mean for us as Good Shepherd Sisters to enter with zeal into the
cosmological phase? What does it mean to understand ourselves in a 13.7 billion universe that is
unfolding? We may ask where is it moving towards? It is moving to greater love, more
relationality and greater care, and in our time, we are called to make a contribution to the evolution
of our way of life.

The church needs our voices as women. There are 35 doctors of the Church and only 4 are women:
St. Therese of Lisieux, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and Hildegard of Bingen. It is important
that we contribute to the life of the church in a significant way and pay attention to anything in us
that says otherwise.

We need to encourage one another to become historically significant in religious life, either in great
or small ways. There is more possibility in us than maybe we see in ourselves. When we look at
one another, we call forth the possibility in one another: sometimes regretfully, nobody calls us
forth.

Where does Christ want us to go? We are called to go where we have not been before. We need
courage and it may feel uncomfortable. Because it means we need to let go of control. It takes
audacity. We will go there together.

We are at a new moment of grace in the evolution of religious life, where we come together in a
field of greater relationality…. The Christ field… (This is a new concept)… think of it in a new
way. We share the energy, the love of Christ between us. This is not static. It has to go deeper. In
whatever manner we relate, we can go deeper to the extent that we deepen the energy of Christ
between us and we can put this into the world.

When we think of the tradition with Christ at the centre, we ask “where is Christ pushing us to the
dge? “
We ask ourselves the question:
- What does not work anymore?
- What do we want to let go of? .

When swimming in a swimming pool, we push away from the side of the pool. What do we feel we
are pushing away from? After pushing from, what are we being pushed forward towards?

We are called to come together beyond fear. Fear is an aspect that contracts. We have the
possibility of relating beyond fear. There is even old thinking in science to illustrate this point. In
this *field* between us that we want to create here, is a field of Christ where there is no fear. Together, we can explore possibilities for new ways of relating that we have not experienced before. We need to let go and step into new *fields*.

Let us look at some new ideas from science that are affecting new ideas about reality. Think of little seeds …we grow the seedling. We go to the garden and carefully put the seedling into the ground and for that seedling to grow, it needs caring and water. For us and our Congregation to grow we are like the little seedling, we need care.

In the past in science, Isaac Newton believed that the world was full of things and there was no real essence, no fluidity. All was solidity. When these interacted with each other it was IMPACT (like a hand punching a boxer’s bag) and not INFLUENCE (like different coloured persons in a circle.) We now know we live in a world of INFLUENCE.

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How do we influence others?
How do we impact others?
How does it feel when we are being impacted?
When someone impacts us in community how does it feel?
Who do we want to influence us?
Become aware that at every moment we are either impacting or influencing someone.

It is fascinating in our new world that we understand ourselves as a *field* and everything we do has an influence or an impact.
We are not separate. We have a *field* of relationality. It is not so much that we are going to give one another something, but, what are we going to do with what we are doing together and how can we influence one another.

Now science is saying we are a *field* of interconnectivity and interrelationality.
At any time we are exerting a positive influence or not engaged or inert. We are challenged in the cosmological perspective to emphasize the interconnected influence between us. Not only are we going to receive something, but, we are also willing to give.

**Introduction to some new words from science.**

Holons  (is something that is simultaneously a whole and a part)
Morphogenic or Morphogenetic *fields* are fields of thought created by everything in existence; it is the input and output of creation. With every thought and action (or non-action) every individual strengthens one of those fields of thought that exist or with the focus of enough minds, creates a new one. You have heard of mass consciousness? This is a morphogenic *field*. Global fear, judgment, peace and love are also morphogenic *fields* in existence, waxing and waning with every individual thought.
Basically, this means that we live in a universe of radical internarlity. Science is finding that at the tiniest level of the quantum we are relational. And at the highest level of the universe everything is held together by gravity.

Science tells us that everything is from the inside. What would it be like if we understood that the inside is us, and that there is no outside. And if we feel we are not part of the inside... the inside can hold everything e.g the inside can hold everything, the momentum, the inertia. But we have a tendency to jump out to the outside... saying things like “it is their problem, not our problem”. If we can understand that there is no outside we will commit to stay on the inside and watch ourselves if we are saying we feel like outsiders. In this new reality, we understand ourselves as being always on the inside.

Look again at the story of the Universe. God was resting. There was nothingness and fullness. And then God decided to create: to create a universe. God could no longer contain God’s love, so God burst forth to create the universe. The divine God loved the God so much that God put God’s tremendous energy into creating. In a moment, the energy of God began to take form. Every element that ever was, was contained in the beginning. Over time stars and then the galaxies emerged... millions of them. How great the universe is! Spiral, distant galaxies, 1 trillion galaxies. Each one has a trillion stars.

Spiral galaxies like the Milky Way emerged: One day a star exploded and all its elements went out into space and those elements created the Sun and our Milky Way. The other planets were also formed by this explosion, called the Super Nova, (there was so much heat in its centre that it exploded). When it exploded out it created Hydrogen, carbon, helium; the scientists call it the Grandmother star.

Scientists tell us our universe is sacrificial. Everything in the universe gives itself for the whole; like the Supernova gave itself in sacrifice so that we could be here. This is a sacrificial universe. Nothing in the universe holds back for itself. We could not be here without the sun. We live in this Milky Way galaxy. We belong to the Congregation of Good Shepherd and earth belongs to the congregation of its solar system.

Of all of the planets in this community, earth is the only planet that is in the right place in relation to the sun to be able to bring forth life. Scientists call this the privileged planet, as it is the only one that can bring forth life.

Earth is a living planet, a water planet. 70% is water and 70% of our body is water. We are the planet. Our matter is the matter of earth. We want to keep the planet healthy for life. Everything is interconnected. Nothing is itself without the rest. All is an interrelated, interconnected, whole, with many living creatures. On this planet the starfish emerged from the ocean. Earth gave birth to life.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that because God could not express God- self in one thing, God created many things, so that what was not in one thing was in the other. The way God expresses God- self is in diversity. Everything has an inside that reflects God on the outside in its difference, beauty and complexity. He says that without this life we could not be here. Thomas Berry says that life could not come on this planet until life had exploded in such diversity...as in our poetry, our religion our art. If we were on a lunar planet, it would be dry. But
we live on a water planet where there are always unions coming together. This is a planet of relationships. Things that love each other come together.

**Unique, beauty, non-repeatable, expressions of God**

One species developed that could think and could reflect on beauty: the human being. We can reflect upon beauty and celebrate it in many different ways. We celebrate the mystery of God, the awe, the joy, in thanksgiving for being alive. We come closer in prayer through all the traditions of the planet because the response of all is adoration.

We are a species of creativity, of difference, because differentiation is a form of the universe and difference is what we celebrate. All of creation is a unique expression of God, especially children.

No two humans are the same. While we celebrate this sometimes, we forget that all is one; that life is connected and all is in God. When we forget the connection and the unity, we are forgetting who we are, our life is diminished. We need to work in the world to bring the connections back together.

In all that holds beauty, in every act of creativity, in each face we encounter, God is revealed, waiting for us to recognize why we are here: for the sake of everyone and for the sake of the future.

**Embracing an Evolutionary World View**

Each of us can remember our emergent awareness of being part of the universe. It may be grandparents who helped us cultivate flowers or admire the sky at night. Experiences in school may have opened our eyes to the differences in nature and the diversity of animals. The green movement has helped us have concern for the sustainability of the planet and emphasizes the interconnection of all things.

In religious formation in the late 1980s, Fr. Thomas Berry, a scholar and expert on Teilhard de Chardin and a cultural historian, challenged religious life to come into a new view. Fr. Thomas a Passionist priest talked of the Passion of Christ, and the Passion of Christ in history. We understand that Christ suffers his passion in the suffering of humanity. Fr. Berry extended the understanding of Christ’s Passion to include his Passion in the earth. In his book “The Dream of the Universe”², Thomas Berry taught that religious life needs to have a large context, the context of the universe. The universe is a unity; it is a sequence of irreversible unfolding. It does not go backwards, only forwards.

The universe came forth in 4 main phases:

Thomas Berry took the thinking of de Chardin, who believed that as the universe unfolds, it unfolds physically, but it also has an inner unfolding. The universe is physical and spiritual. The universe is continually emerging and the universe reflects God. The universe is a community and nothing is itself without everything else.

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² Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Universe*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988)
Thomas Berry taught about differentiation: everything is held in communion and everything has a deep inner aspect, a deep birth. When we do not understand this he said, we destroy God’s creation and when we do this we suffer a soul loss.

(To see something on the living out of Thomas Berry’s vision in Sr. Gail Worcelo’s community refer to www.greenmountainmonastery.org )