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**GATHERED & SENT**  
**Matching Them Up!**

**We shall not cease from exploration**  
**And the end of all our exploring**  
**Will be to arrive where we started**  
**And know the place for the first time**

T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* "Little Gidding,"

**A BIT OF HISTORY**

My first acquaintance with Christian Brothers was in St. Louis in the late 50s and early 60s. The rival schools were CBC, Jesuit, and McBride (Marianist). The Christian Brothers and the Marianists also had communities down the road from each other in Eureka, just outside of St. Louis.

My more sustained acquaintance was in 1977 when I took a faculty position at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. When I moved into my office on my first "working day" there, a piece

of mail was already on the desk, and it was from Bob Smith. We connected quickly over shared interests in process theology. We have stayed in touch ever since. [Bob, I remember a lovely visit with you in Nairobi, Kenya.]

It was a great honor to have been invited to evaluate the Humanities Program at Bethlehem University some ten or so years ago. One of the conversations I remember vividly at Bethlehem University was with a young Palestinian woman who was to be married shortly after graduation. She said, "I would never bring a child into this world. My prayer everyday to Allah is that when it is safe, I will not be too old to bear a child." Her words had tears with them. I am quite sure that the culture of a Christian Brothers Catholic institution of higher learning helped her to be able to say that out loud.

While at Bethlehem University, I lived in the Brothers' community for a week and a half. There were so many ways that it felt, culturally, almost like home. Our origins are a century apart, but with significant French similarities. We both come from France and from times of considerable turmoil, and from a clear penchant for the formation of young people, since they are the artisans of whatever world will next come into existence.

When I was invited to share some reflections with you here today, I asked for a copy of your ***Rule of Life***, a biography of your Founder, and any other documents that would give me fuller background. My copy of Bro. Luke's ***The Word Is Yours: The Life of Saint Jean Baptist de la Salle*** is highlighted and marked up from the first page to the last!

## **LINKING THREE UNDERSTANDINGS**

My reflections will be around three themes.

I will first borrow from cultural anthropology to distinguish between “deep story” and “charism,” which is a pragmatically useful distinction—not just intellectually but functionally. (Or so I hope!)

Second, I propose to look at some changes in Religious Life since Vatican II for critical insight and (perhaps) guidance for post-Conciliar religious life. The collaboration between religious communities and lay women and men I believe is critical. But!--that means laymen and laywomen profoundly formed in the religious community’s deep story, and real participants in it. I know that you are doing that.

Third and last, I will focus upon some cultural contextualization of contemporary young adults, and look for some clues to our religious-life futures as educators of these young people. Six or eight significant books concerning young adults have come out in the last ten or twelve years. A widespread effort to understand and interpret these young adults is a good clue that something significant is going on here.

### **ONE: DEEP STORY and CHARISM**

I am indebted to Peter Worsley’s book on cultural anthropology, *The Trumpet shall sound*, and to Stephen Crites’ article, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” for the reflections that follow. I will

be using words more fitted to conversation about religious life than theirs which are drawn more from cultural anthropology.

Principally, I will take the word “charism” that we frequently use about our communities, and break it into two separate notions: “Deep Story” and “Charism,” which I believe offers some guidance to us. The ways that the social sciences describe a charismatic person has some pay-off in understanding Charism in religious life.

Deep Story is our narrative character—the story-line--which connects us from era to era to era. Our deep story, our narrative structures, give us our continuity era after era after era.

I do not believe that Charism can be transmitted into a different era, recovered as it were. It can only be reconstituted, reinvented, and will not ever be identical to its predecessors.

## **DEEP STORY**

Every culture has what I will call a Deep Story, a narrative structure. It gets modified and transformed in different eras, without giving up its basic narrative structure. When we read our respective histories, we understand the non-negotiable pieces that keep showing up. Some words and ideas change—but there is something always steadily identifiable—that is what I am calling a community’s Deep Story.

No one can ever exhaustibly tell their Deep Story. You can catch the American Deep Story if you read Lincoln’s speeches, see *Gone with the Wind*, listen to Johnny Cash and Joan Baez, stroll down Broadway in New York, visit the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

There is, indeed, a Christian Brothers' Deep Story—the “at-homeness” you feel in whatever community you name (even with vast differences, there is a narrative sameness). The Deep Story took shape in any order's foundational years and experiences. Stories from Reims, Paris, Rouen, Vaugirard, each of them, discloses the emerging narrative structure of your Deep Story.

No one can ever tell a Deep Story. All we can do is cite instances that reflect it, none of which exhausts it. Deep Stories can vary and develop without losing their identifiable character. The ways a *Rule of Life* gets reinterpreted and restated and revised by General Chapters is an example of change that also stays the same.

Deep Stories are clear to our experience, even as they evade any complete telling of them, and they will even be differently shaped, but still identifiable, from one nation's culture to the next. The “culture” of the Christian Brothers is perhaps another way of naming it. There is a community of memory that creates you. That is what I am calling Deep Story.

## **NOW WE LOOK AT CHARISM**

When in popular usage we say that someone or some group has “Charism” we are really naming their perceived effectiveness in the world in which we and he or she lives—effectiveness perhaps with a flair. Not just a bit effective in passing, but hugely engaging, publicly appreciated. ***Charism names a very highly effective connection between a deep story and a contemporary social***

***situation, and it is an effective connection that is widely perceived and named and praised.***

But here's the catch: **Charism is never a claim one makes for oneself.** It is a **public** perception of the profound effectiveness of a group, normally at work in a difficult and challenging time. Charism does not appear in settled times. And **today**, I believe, is not indeed a settled time! Charism names a public perception of something experienced as extraordinary. Jack Kennedy could not have named himself a charismatic presence. ***The public experience of some community as both faithful to its deep story and provocatively and effectively responsive to the cry of the age is what is essential to what I am trying to identify as Charism.***

Peter Worsley's description of what is going on for there to be named a charismatic person applies usefully, I believe, to religious orders.

First, something is happening in a culture in which a number of people have possibly utopian or unrealized aspirations. Charism doesn't turn up in settled times. I sense that this is now a time open to both civil and religious charism!

Second, there is someone or some group able to articulate those poignant aspirations, and consolidate them because he or she (or a small group) embodies these values and aspirations, and knows them from the inside out.

Third, what such a person or group needs to do, finally, is to “become the basis of collective social action, and to be perceived, invested with meaning, and acted upon by significant others (Worsley, p. 16). There is some avid following!

Fourth. But no one is ever “charismatic” alone, on one’s own.. One (or a group) has to be publicly recognized, socially validated, and able to attract followers. But it would be folks out there, beyond the insider group, that judge Charisma to be at work (doesn’t have to be that word). And that is when followers start happening, joiners, people hooking their destiny to what the world apparently feels is needed. A religious order begins and/or continues when people are hooking their destiny to Charisma palpably at work.

All of these were clear to me when I read the biography of Jean Baptiste de la Salle

I think it fair to say that Charism is always part of the initiation of a new religious community. A new deep story is initiated at a Charism-potential moment. The deep story can continue. But **Charism will have to be reinvented over and over**, and never as self-conferral—but when the Deep Story is once again profoundly and effectively at work in the world, and is recognized and validated by others, not by us, at least, not by us alone.

I conclude this section with the surmise that our Church and our world are ripe for Deep Stories capable of Charism, to which disciplined high imagination is critical. The other word for that is “prophetic imagination,” knowing how to live now in view of the world that needs to come into existence.

It’s my guess that ecclesial culture is ripe for having its Deep Story modified and recast, especially with reference to our younger generation. The polarization of both religious and civic culture cries out for courage and vivid imagination—both of which appear more readily in young hearts, but need the support of our older hearts. I find it instructive as well as intriguing that while Greeks center personhood in the head, Hebrews center it in the heart. I was born a Greek Catholic but somewhere along the line turned into a Hebrew Catholic! Heart indeed needs head. ***But heart is where the aching excitement occurs that can stir a world.***

I conclude this section with an ascetical challenge—at least it is a large one for me. If we are not imaginatively, effectively, and pastorally speaking to our age, our survival chances are limited. That frightens me, because I want my community to last. ***And that is the wrong reason.*** I must give myself heart and soul because I believe that we have something to give that the reign of God in the world desperately needs. It’s for God’s sake that we respond with power and imagination, ***not for us to survive.*** I think of Becket’s remark (in T. S. Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*, when the devil tempts him to suffer martyrdom so that he can look down from heaven on his killers in hell. And Thomas says, “The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right need for the wrong reason.” The



right reason is offering what we can to what the world needs, for God's sake!

There is part of a poem in Naomi Shihab Nye,s book of poetry, the Yellow Glove, that catches the spirit of the difference between charism and deep story:

### TELLING THE STORY

Streets aren't gold,  
but they could be.

Some start out  
with a big story  
that shrinks.

Some stories accumulate power  
like a sky gathering clouds, quietly, quietly  
till the story rains around you.

Some get tired of the same story  
and quit speaking.

What will we learn today?  
There should be an answer,  
and it should  
change.

Excerpted from the poem, “Telling the Story,” in the book **Yellow Glove**, by Naomi Shihab Nye

## **TWO: SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL & AFTER**

I will risk an historical assessment here—or maybe just a guess.

The late 1940s until the early 1960s were an unusual time for religious orders in this country. Following World War II, the numbers of new members was unnaturally high, partly because Catholic identity was quite clear and compelling.

Religious life had for a long while been called the life of perfection. But Vatican II made it clear that all people are called to the same perfection. That leveled the playing field! The exodus from religious life was huge. My Province’s sixty-person formation Center at St. Mary’s University had become too small, so we built a facility in the mid-1960s with two hundred rooms. Well, you know the story!

Sometime around 1970 I was interacting with some fellow Brothers before we entered the auditorium to hear a presentation by a renowned speaker. My colleague said to me, “If I hear one more person say that this is a time of profound change, I think I’ll throw up.” He didn’t throw up, but that was the opening sentence.

Times of great ecclesial changes leave their mark on lay, religious, and clerical life. The departures of many religious I would

guess is somewhat connected to Vatican II's recognition that "the family is a kind of school of deeper humanity (*Gaudium et Spes*, #52).

So here is one guess I am making. With the decline in numbers of members of religious orders and the increase of respect for the lay apostolic calling, ***I surmise that religious orders who connect effectively with lay people who share, and perhaps even co-own its Deep Story, stand the best chance of making Charism happen once again.*** The co-ownership is often felt risky by religious communities. Real co-ownership means sharing power, sharing in decision making—not just "collaborating with." Our point is not to have Charism happen. No one can control that or organize that. Our point is to reorganize how we give our Deep Story a chance to take off in a new way—a way that is radically responsive to what appears actually to be the case in the contemporary Church.

This year's annual gathering of the College Theology Society was at St. Mary's in San Antonio. I attended a presentation by Prof Rose Beal from St. Mary's in Minnesota (which I visited when I was on the faculty of St. John's in Collegeville). Her topic was "A Lesson from Lasallian Christian Brothers for Lay Theologians Today." She said that "De la Salle had to demonstrate that it was preferable that the Brothers remain laymen in order better to serve the church and participate in its mission. In the mid-twentieth century, Congar and Sauvage had to make bold claims concerning the apostolic character of the whole church, the active role of the laity in the church and its mission, and the potential for spiritual competence on the part of the laity."

Most of us have welcomed lay collaborators along the way—people who collaborate with us. What I am suggesting is religious and lay collaboration on a ***different but equal basis***: genuine co-ownership of the La Sallian or Marianist or Franciscan or Dominican or Mercy or Jesuit Deep Story. This would require profound collaborative instincts, and perhaps (even probably!) many new organizational transformations (especially formational dynamics).

I certainly do not have any concrete directions. A lot of us are struggling to find a model that feels like it's the collaboration of equals—not just those people joining our mission.

I think some of us in religious life have been building in that direction, which calls for a wider ownership of our Deep Story and shared stewardship of it.

To quote Shakespeare: “Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.” At least it is for me! A possible direction with hope as its name. At least, maybe so!

For your community and mine, I suspect the transformations will reflect collaboration with lay women and men on an equal basis, not to survive, but because this is possibly a new collaborative arrangement in Ecclesia. Not third order membership, but some form of real membership **with a voice**.

This is technically and canonically and organizationally challenging.

I say that knowing the challenge that it is to my community as well. There were Lay Marianist men and women in Bordeaux for sixteen years before the Marianist Sisters came into existence in 1816, and the Brothers of Mary (men Marianists) in 1817. The three

branches are autonomous but interdependent. We are struggling also to put collaboration on an equal basis.

Now we turn attention to the culture young adults in Western cultur. They are a new kind of young culture--one with different consequences than we have addressed in any past history. They are a lovely group and also an independent group--but also a dialogic group if they know their voice matters.

### **THREE: YOUNG ADULTS IN WESTERN CULTURE**

As an “old adult” trying to reflect upon “young adults,” I am conscious of words of T.S. Eliot in *The Four Quartets* (Burnt Norton):

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still.

It was Andrew Greeley who in the ‘60s coined the phrase “the new breed” about young adults. I sense that what they are today is in continuity with the profound changes that began in the ‘60s—those were just the beginning stages, but already identifiable. I was a student in Berkeley in the late 60s and early 70s, and sense that I watched some of the new becoming of young adults from up close!

My focus is upon the United States, knowing that Canadian world is quite similar, as are the Western European nations, though with more cultural differences. The phrase “young adults” gets defined in multiple ways. I have in mind high school students, and then through the twenties and thirties. They are culturally rather

unlike what has shaped our responsiveness to them in many generations past.

There are about 50,000,000 such young adults in the United States, about a fourth of whom, some 12,500,000, identify as Catholic. But only some 16-20% of them (different studies vary a bit but are close to this) regularly participate in the life of the Church. But the other 80% of them still identify as Catholic. They are not hostile; they are just not actively connected.

The following quotations are from scattered places throughout the book: *Young Adult Catholics*: Dean Hoge, et al. They certainly ring true to my experience of young adults. I don't cite them because I know the right response to them--but perhaps so that we can share wisdom and inventiveness. These all ring true to me.

Most young adult Catholics are not angry at the church. They are simply distanced from it.

In spite of this weaker institutional connection, the majority of young Catholics "like being Catholic," and can't imagine themselves being anything other than Catholic.

[Even though their active participation is low.]

Significant numbers of young adult Catholics today no longer see the Roman Catholic Church as unique or essential, the pope as necessary, the Church's structures as important or tradition as a source of objective truth . . . This is not exclusively a failure of leadership. It is part of the larger alienation of *all* authoritative institutions that is taking place in all American religious communities.

Many young adults have a difficult time articulating a coherent sense of Catholic identity.

[Not just young adults on this one!]

While young adult Catholics rank social justice high in what they regard as essential to their faith, the relationship between social justice and a **specific Catholic identity** remains unclear . . . If the relationship between social justice and a **specifically Catholic identity** were more immediate to young adult Catholics, their perspective might be more concerned with structural approaches, aggregate effects, power, and institutional systems--in keeping with contemporary Church teachings regarding social justice.

[I think this is really a key piece.]

On the positive side, this shift toward individual religious identity-construction allows a greater assumption of responsibility within the tradition by many young adult Catholics for their religious and spiritual life—as mandated by Vatican II.

Unlike their evangelical counterparts, the current generation of young adult Catholics is less theologically orthodox than their elders.

Many [young adult Catholics] complained of the absence of meaningful young adult ministries and activities in their parishes.

[I'd put at least 3 young adults of every Parish Council, at least one of whom is married.]

Aside from activities associated with involvement with church, social justice initiatives, and intermittent use of the sacraments, it is not clear what, behaviorally

speaking, constitutes commitment to the mission of the Church among many young adults. Institutional Catholicism is simply not of central importance in their lives.

The type of positive approach associated with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) with its emphasis on mentoring, deliberation, community, and discipleship, is a helpful model.

People who experience empowerment through the church will become stronger Catholics.

The communal nature of the Church should be emphasized. More attention and energy should be given to building community in parish life. But the liturgy alone should not bear the entire burden of this task. Small faith communities and action-oriented projects will also be important.

This community building initiative should not be construed simply as bringing back young adults who are feeling isolated and in need of support and intimacy. ***Young adults must see that community is an ecclesial dimension that is intrinsic to their Catholic identity and God,*** or even between the individual and the hierarchy representing God; they must feel that it is a community-mediated and community-articulated identity.

[Emphasis added.]

This is where having institutional collaborators, parents and young adults as co-owners of the Christian Brothers' or Marianists' Deep Story could be hugely and insightfully energizing. Each group would do it differently. I certainly do not know absolutely for sure that



a new lay-religious co-ownership of Deep Story is the way to go. But I believe it to be worth seriously entertaining as a possibility. That would perhaps mean giving lay members voting rights and some form of participation in leadership structures and Chapters. Mostly, it will take imagination, not just suggestions but some wild guesses, some eschatological hope that “something else might be the case!”

## **CLOSING**

If one tries to situate religious life in the contemporary Church, the avenues of approach are manifold. I have used three of them: (1) affirming an important distinction between a community’s Deep Story and its potential to become Charism; (2) Vatican II and perfection as everyone’s calling--a new framework for collaboration between lay and religious; and (3) the critical call in religious communities such as yours and mine to take seriously the social texture of today’s young adults. All three of these belong together. They are of a piece. This is not the only way to assess the contemporary context for religious life (there are many), but perhaps it does suggest some avenues for communities like yours and mine.

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### **Addition**

In earlier drafts of my reflections, this is where I concluded. But some things have been stirring in institutional Catholicism, that incline me to add a wild guess. **It's speculative and risky to offer as a clear judgment, but maybe a surmise worth pondering. Here goes.**

I now recall a "sort of admonition" from my Church history Professor, the renowned Dominican Church Historian, Marie-Humbert Vicaire, at the Universite de Fribourg in Switzerland where I did seminary. It was the 1964-65 academic year, while the Second Vatican Council was in session, and hopes and excitement were sky high. In the midst of the exhilaration, Pere Vicaire sounded a note of caution.

Most Church Councils and Diocesan Synods were called to address troubled times or greatly disputed issues. Only relatively few, he said, were called for up-dating, for deliberately and seriously moving forward. These Councils, Pere Vicaire observed, created huge initial, responsive excitement. But then, fear took hold as the changes took shape, and there were long periods of retrenchment. Only when the Church finally worked those reactions out of its system could the reforms really get underway.

Sometimes for such Council and/or Synods, one must wait until the new batch of leaders are not old enough to remember a "before the Council" period—that would be perhaps Bishops and theologians 45-60.

The excitement after Vatican II is still vivid for those of us old enough to remember the before and after. Mass was in Latin. Eucharist is now in English. Sometimes the closing music at Eucharistic Liturgy was "Let the Sun Shine In," from the raucous musical, "Hair." Adults sang them too—and

certainly young adults. There was Ray Repp's music, and then the St. Louis Jesuits.

But soon in the 90s and beyond, there were pull-backs and hesitations. We know the story. I then remembered Pere Vicaire's comments from 25 years earlier. The present Pope celebrates the Eucharist in Latin, often pictured with his back to the gathered community.

Now I am not yet sanguinely optimistic, but hopeful that that new era might be (somewhat, at least) immanent. There are some interesting recent movements. A significant number of priests in Austria have formed a new organization with members from both diocesan clergy and religious orders, pushing for some major reforms in both theology and practice, such as the ordination of married men. There is a similar organization in Germany, with some noted theologians among the members. There is also a recent organization of priests in the United States, which meets this summer. There is a new priests organization now in Ireland (with considerable lay responsiveness to them).

The Vatican investigation of American Religious women is stirring wide interest, as well as considerable out-loud wide support for these remarkable women. Seven Provinces of Franciscan Friars, the Cincinnati Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, and the international head office of the Xaverian Brothers have passed a resolutions of support for LCWR. At its recent meeting in St. Louis in early June, the Catholic Theological Society passed a resolution in support of religious women in this country.

There is also considerable disarray over power issues and secrecy in the Vatican. An article (this is a surprise) in the July 7-13 issue of ***The Economist*** says that "Pope Benedict XVI's most senior official, his secretary of state Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone accused journalists of trying to imitate the

American writer, Dan Brown, author of the preposterous and bestselling, *The Da Vinci Code*.” The article describes some of the power struggles underway—hardly a new insight.

One of the pieces of wisdom that I have taken from process theology, especially from the writings of Bernard Loomer, is the difference between unilateral power and relational power.

The 12,500,000 young adult Catholics in this country are an interesting group. They identify as Catholic, even though only 16-20% of them are regularly active. But they still claim Catholic identity! I have a lot of them in my classes at St. Mary’s University. I wonder whether they are waiting, and if so, what they are waiting for.

So I wonder, I really wonder, if perhaps the reaction to Vatican II is out of our system (or getting there with some last blasts), and whether the Second Vatican Council is perhaps about to happen. I know that sounds dramatic, but it’s worth pondering at least momentarily. Maybe we have worked some resistances out of our system. My interaction with young adults suggests that it’s a possibility worth pondering. I do not know whether this is a reasonable idea to entertain, or just “a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

I conclude with a passage from Henry Nelson Wieman’s book, *The Source of Human Good*:

**We must be broken**

because there is a good so great  
it breaks the bounds of our littleness.

**We must be broken**

because there is a power  
which works in our lives to achieve a good  
we cannot compass and cannot discern,  
until some later time in retrospect  
reveals the form of a new creation  
now visibly emerging.

**We must be broken**

because there is a God  
who works for righteousness so great  
that it cannot be confined  
to the limits of our control.

**We must be broken**

because there is, day by day,  
the creating of a kingdom of goodness  
in depth and height and scope  
so far beyond the reach of any human plan  
that it must not be constricted  
to our imposed directive.

**We must be broken**

because above us,  
above the breakdown and the ruin,  
of plans and reasons and ages and nations  
There is a beating of great wings.

## YOUNG ADULTS Some Helpful Resources

D'Antonio, William; Davidson, James; Hoge, Dean; and Wallace, Ruth .  
***Laity: American and Catholic / Transforming the Church.*** Sheed & Ward.

William D'Antonio; Davidson, James; Hoge, Dean; and Gautier, Mary.  
***American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church.***  
Sheed & Ward.

D'Antonio, William, Anthony Pogorelc, *et al.* ***Voices of the Faithful:  
Loyal Catholics Striving for Change.*** New York: 2007. Crossroad, Herder &  
Herder:

Hoge, Dean; Dinges, Johnson, William, Mary; and Gonzales, Juan.  
***Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice.*** University of Notre  
Dame Press.

Pearce, Lisa; and Denton, Melinda Lundquist. ***A Faith of Their Own:  
Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents.*** Oxford  
University Press.

Smith, Christian, with Patricia Snell. ***Souls in Transition: The Religious  
& Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults.*** New York: Oxford University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. ***After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-  
Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion.*** Princeton  
University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. ***Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and  
America's New Quest for Community.*** Macmillan Free Press