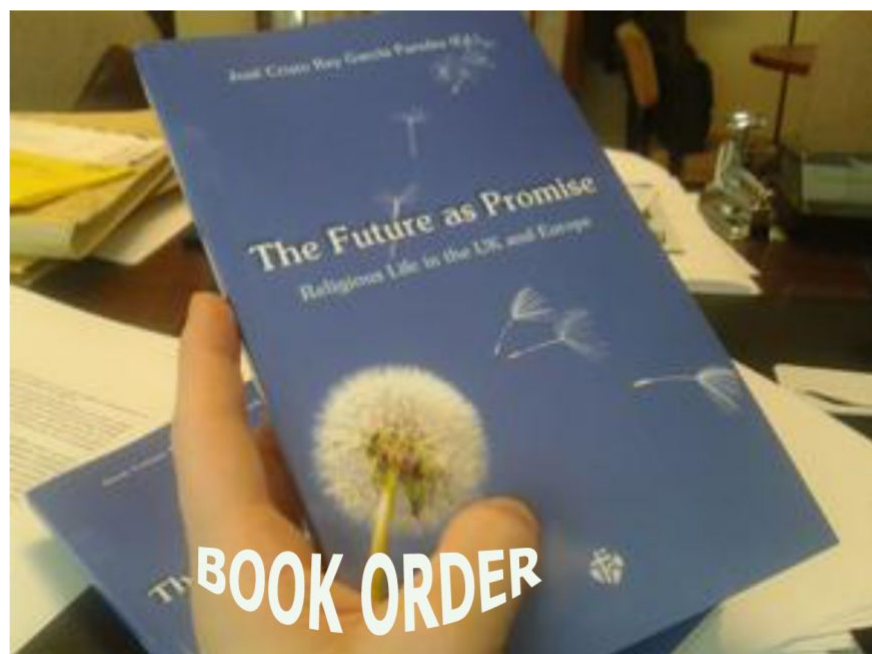


## The Future as Promise - Our God is in a Covenant with Europe.



## THE FUTURE AS PROMISE Religious Life in the UK and Europe

Talks presented during the first Religious Life Congress (Hayes Encounter 2012) organised by the Claretian Missionaries on the 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> of May, 2012

By Fr. Timothy **Radcliffe**, Archbishop Joseph W. **Tobin**, Fr. Josep **Abel**, Fr. J.C.R. **García Paredes** and others

The future of religious life in Europe is intimately connected with the future of the faith. This is one of the major preoccupations of the Church at this moment. For this reason, a Synod has been convoked by the Church on “The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith” and the Year of Faith.

There are three circumstances that do not make the vocational experience for religious life in Europe easy: cultural secularisation, religious chaos and the distrust of institutions.

1.- The vocation to religious life is not able to flourish where the existence of God is denied or the “silence of God” is openly spoken about. A secularized culture removed from the connection with God is not a suitable place for a vocation to religious life to grow. Religious life is defined as that form of human life which accentuates the connection of the Covenant with God over everybody else.

2.- Again, Europe is a space for religious liberty and, perhaps as a consequence, for religious chaos. In Europe there is a multiplicity of religious manifestations. Nobody can be unaware of the growing presence of Islam or of the various forms of Buddhism and Hinduism or also of the impressive presence of popular Christian piety manifested in shrines, pilgrimages and popular celebrations. All these forms of religiosity can theoretically be a space for growth in faith and where particular “religious” callings could happen. Nevertheless, we discover that this inter-religious space does not nurture, in a vocational way, our form of consecrated life.

3.- There is a third element that blocks the call to religious life in Europe: it is the mistrust of religious institutions. The religious experience that these institutions try to offer often seems to smother the charism and the spirituality. It gives the impression that religious institutions do not deliver what they promise.

This has been the context in which this Conference of Religious Life in the United Kingdom happened,

which we have called “**Hayes Encounter, 2012**”. The Claretian Missionaries, on celebrating the centenary of their presence in the United Kingdom, have wished to sponsor this congress on Religious Life, which had eminent speakers and the unexpected participation of more than 250 religious women and men. There was a notable participation in the exchanges during these days and the desire was expressed that these conferences continue in the future.

We have been encouraged to launch this initiative –which has had Frs. Chris Newman, cmf and Angel Ochagavia, cmf as it’s motivators– by our service to consecrated life worldwide in the **Theological Institutes of Religious Life** (offering degree and doctoral level courses) in Rome (Claretianum), Madrid (ITVR), Manila (ICLA), Bangalore (Sanyasa). We have also undertaken this initiative with the warm support of the Conference of Religious in England and Wales.

“Publicaciones Claretianas” (Claretian Publications in Madrid) wished to participate in it with the presence and support of its Director, Fr. Fernando Prado, cmf and offered it’s willingness to publish the texts of the different interventions. This book is the result.

You will discover that on speaking of the future of religious life in Europe the authors are not “futurologists”: that is to say, it is not based on statistical data nor on sociological or psychological forecasts. They do not use the category of “futurum”, of which the theologians of expectation speak about or of the political theologies but rather of the category of “adventus”. “Adventus”, advent, is the hope of the fulfilment of the promises. **Our God is in a Covenant with Europe.** He cannot separate Himself from it, nor from the European Church nor from the European religious life. He will fulfil His promises; and He will fulfil them counting on us. It remains for us to be open to His Grace, to His saving coming. For this reason, religious life in Europe has a future. The well-known speakers at the conference have shown this with their valuable contributions.

Pentecost Sunday, 2012

**José Cristo Rey García Paredes, cmf.**

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