

The Mission of Religious



Pope Francis' Prayer intention for October 2018

Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sandra Schneiders, knows a lot about religious life. She is Professor Emerita of New Testament Studies and Christian Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, California. She has written extensively on religious life, including a major trilogy on religious life in the new millennium.

Schneiders believes 'immediacy to God and social marginality are what equip the religious' for what she calls the 'double prophetic task of public lament and energising hope'. The task is as necessary today as it was in the past and will be in the future.

In many of Schneiders published works she defines aspects of religious life. Below is a mere sampling of her thoughts:

- > **Religious life** is a freely chosen response to a personally discerned vocation ... which is a gift of God to the person and through the person to the Church.
- > **Religious life** is the oldest vocation life form in the Church, preceding both matrimony and ordained ministry as public vocations in the Church. And

even in its worst times of internal corruption and external persecution, the church has never been totally devoid of this life form.

- > **Religious life** is a life-movement at the heart of the Church which has taken very diverse forms at different periods in history and is undergoing massive change in our own times.
- > **Religious life** starts with God, not primarily as the ultimate horizon in terms of whom everything is done, but as the first point of reference in which being and action originate.
- > **Religious** choose a form of community life that transcends personal taste or advantage and intends to witness to the transcendent inclusivity of Christ's universal reign.
- > **Religious life** is a quest for justice: immediacy to God as a mode of Christian experience and marginality as a position in the secular order.
- > **Religious** are marginal by choice, but that marginality is in the service of prophecy, not of escapism. From the edges of the system there is a view of what the system does to those who are excluded, to those who are made means to other people's ends. If contemplation fosters immediacy to God, marginality fosters immediacy to the oppressed.
- > **Religious** want to be where the cry of the poor meets the ear of God. To feel the pathos of God is not a warm and comfortable religious experience; it is an experience of the howling wilderness driving one to protest ... To be on the edge, as Jesus was, gives one a certain freedom to see what is really happening and to say what one sees regardless of the consequences.

Let us give thanks and praise for the religious we have been blessed to follow. May they continue to be influencers in the public sphere and the guiding lights of hope in our world today and may their spirits and charism continue to bear fruit in the work we do.

REFLECTION

- > How do we treasure the legacy of the religious sisters who founded our ministries?