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Charles Bonnet

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## Reflections on Discernment and Accompaniment

*by Charles Bonnet  
Sulpician Priest  
20-VII-2001*

I must acknowledge that it was a bit imprudent of me last September to accept speaking to you this morning and there are at least three reasons:

- Imprudent because this talk falls during an extremely busy time for me as I just spent the first two weeks of July preparing, directing, and then participating as a simple member at our Provincial Assembly which elected my successor as provincial and following that I had to prepare to move to Lyon where I will be next year. This explains the lateness of providing my texts and work.
- Imprudent also because I am used to giving talks on vocation and spiritual discernment to future priests. I am less used to matters concerning the sisters, even the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, and yet we are somewhat “cousins.” “Cousins” is the name given to Vincentians, Oratorians, Eudists and Sulpicians seeing that, founded in the same era, they lived the spiritualities called forth from the French School. In spite of all that, I hardly know my “cousins,” even with the fact that my own family cousin is a Daughter of Charity in Madagascar.
- And, imprudent because I am not addressing the sisters directly but that particular race that are the Directors of the Daughters of Charity. A race that Fr. Lautissier gave me a few hints about. But I acknowledge, even after having read the Constitutions and Statutes, the Director’s Directory and an article by Fr. Quintano on this topic, I am having a hard time imagining how the Directors play a concrete role close to the sisters and how, in the reality of things, they share responsibilities, especially within different countries and cultures as well.

But since, “the wine is poured, it must be drunk.” Please excuse me if it is still a bit young and not to full maturity. I have been asked to speak about two things: “vocational” discernment and accompaniment of the sisters during their lives. There are many common points even if this concerns distinctive stages of life.

### **1. VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT**

Religious vocation is at the turning point of two plans: the plan of one who is asking to enter the Daughters of Charity and the plan of the Congregation that

wants to have a future and to find persons who will take over and carry on with the work undertaken in the spirit of its Founders. Discernment will be the adjustment of these two plans.

### **1.1. To feel called is not enough**

The constitutions, as well as those who present themselves, spontaneously take up the vocabulary of a vocation: “I feel called by God.” It is a generous sentiment but does not absolutely prove that one is called by God, for God has been silent for a long time. We are no longer in the time of Prophets that God would speak to directly, nor in the time of Jesus who chose “whom he wanted.” Today, God has no other means to convey his will to us except through creation: feelings or abilities that God gives us. Discernment will be precisely searching in what conditions this sentiment of being called truly expresses the will of God.

One does not hold on to the feeling of being called for nothing, for it expresses where the desire is. I feel called because it pleases me, I want to do it, it is there that I think I will be happy and blossom fully to what God has given me. This desire can appear in various ways: frequenting sisters who have given the desire to live like they do, an invitation given by one of them, concern for service of the poor which makes one look for ways to do it successfully, discovering Vincent de Paul, etc. Vocation stories are often very varied and sometimes surprising. But the desire is only a starting point. It must mature and no longer be an illusion.

### **1.2. It can be an illusion**

**It can be an illusion of the very life of which one dreams.** One wishes to consecrate herself to God and to the poor and finds that this takes place through a life in community with specific sisters, who entered for their sanctification but still have a long way to go; that one is under the direction of superiors who are called servants but who do not make their authority felt any less; that the service of the poor is not what one imagined and sometimes instead of being sent to the poor, one is sent to cook. That is why one cannot discern with hindsight. It must occur within a long probationary time to verify if it is well this life that is desired and in this style. All vocation always goes through an imaginary mourning to accept reality, even when one truly believes that one knows. Sometimes this discovery is discouraging, and other times it is stimulating. It was not the life I imagined but it is the life I want to live. But there is almost always a time of confusion, at the beginning or a little later. And it is important to understand that this confusion or this doubt does not necessarily mean that one is not called to this life but it is a normal part of the journey.

**There can be illusion on the very reasons for which one wishes to become a Daughter of Charity.** Why do I want to enter this society? To serve God, yes, but also perhaps to be like sister so-and-so, to please my parents, to be admired by others in choosing a heroic lifestyle, to prove to myself and others that I am capable of doing it, because I am afraid of life or marriage, to punish myself for living a dissolute life up until now, etc. and even other more bizarre reasons. There is never a chemically pure desire, of unambiguous and perfectly Christian motivations. All of this is very muddled: one finds there the best and the less good. This is nothing shocking. It is important to face reality and have the courage to take inventory of all the acknowledged or unacknowledged reasons for one's choice. Some stereotypical pious words can suppress problems in slipping into an assumed will. One must not be afraid to bring light into the darkest inner recesses. It is the only way to clean up and put things in order.

**What is important are not the motivations that one has at the beginning, but those for which one makes a choice in the end.** Even if one enters for questionable reasons, this does not mean that this person does not have a vocation. The Spirit can use anything to guide us where the Spirit awaits us. Even if one entered for poor reasons, it must be for good reasons that one wishes to stay. One must simply, calmly, peacefully come to desire this life for truly Christian reasons, what is traditionally called the right intention. There is an entire education to be done so that this be the service of God, the will to live according the Gospel which become the first and fundamental motive, even if it continues to mix with other things. These residuals must be lived with humor in order not to be taken too seriously.

For, **in the end, the desire must become availability.** I very much would like to enter the Daughters of Charity but “may your will be done and not mine.” If I am accepted, I will see your will in that. If I am not accepted, if unforeseen circumstances of health, if a lack of abilitie hinders me from continuing, I will see your will there also. It is truly a vocation only if one is ready to renounce one's vocation, if it appears that it is not there that God wants us. The “I want or I would like” must always be transformed into “Here am I, if you want.” Otherwise, it is not a vocation but a command given to God.

### **1.3. Verifying if the plan responds to the expectations of the Company**

**It is there that the personal plan meets the plan of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.** The chapter of the Constitutions that speaks of membership and formation begins with this citation from Monsieur Vincent: “*You must often beg God, ... to fill the persons who enter the Company with the spirit he wants all of you to possess, so that by this means you may be able to continue the good work that has been started.*” “*... to continue the good work that has been started.*” All of society, and the Daughters of Charity are no

exception, want descendants, daughters who will take up and continue “the temporal and spiritual service of the poor”. It is for this mission that there is a desire for numerous vocations that will follow in the same Spirit as St. Vincent.

Therefore, it does not suffice when someone wishes to enter the Daughters of Charity that she is able to “*continue the good ... begun.*” **It must be verified if she has the abilities for this mission.** One does not enter a society that does everything but enters a society that has a mission. Will she be “useful” for this mission? I do not hesitate to use the word “useful” that Canon Law uses concerning the call of priests: the bishop only ordains priests that are “useful.” Useful means usable, that one could employ effectively in the different missions of the Company. The Company has its works, its positions: its service of the poor, apostolic services, functioning of the community. The one presenting herself is she apt for at least one or another of these missions? This is also part of vocational discernment. To have a vocation to come to the Daughters of Charity, there must be a vocation to the work that is theirs, ability to do one’s share and to do it in a spirit that directs these activities and is its source. If not, it suffices to join a humanitarian organization that does a similar work.

**She will live this life within established conditions. Firstly, she must accept a loss of autonomy.** Used to being single up to this point, managing her life, her money, her travels and her time independently, she will now live under control, depending on an authority for her activities, her expenses, her going out, her free time. Even prayer is not up to the free choice of each one: its rhythms, times, methods and places are determined by the rules of the society or those responsible for the community. The autonomy given to each one is undoubtedly greater than it had been, but its limits are always felt at one moment or another. If some experience it as a freedom from concern for oneself – not always very healthy – for many it is a painful renunciation that requires time, especially if one entered later in life, to be able to live serenely, as a breath and not in confinement. If this loss of autonomy can only be lived in stress or protest, like an unbearable yoke and not in freedom and detachment, even often seen with humor, this would be a contraindication. “God made us free men (and women)” we sing. If the methods of service are lived as in slavery, one must release oneself or achieve releasing oneself from this mentality or take up one’s freedom again.

**She will live it in a community,** with sisters whom she did not choose and were given to her as “neighbor” by the will of superiors. A neighbor whom it is not enough to love as oneself but with whom one must live. It is often presented like a family that one has not chosen and requires a commitment of sharing, common life, and common prayer that many families do not require and that would make more than one break up over it. Certainly deep friendships can be formed, a feeling of common belonging can facilitate relationships. But when

one listens to religious, they often return to this topic and I do not believe that the fact of having Charity as one's mother prevents the Daughters from having the same difficulties.

Also, the ability to live this life will play an essential role in discernment. One must always be attentive in this area. Certainly some sisters can become embittered or not age well, but too many communities are victims of sisters of whom it is known, since the noviciate, that they are "difficult sisters." Time rarely changes things in this area and if sometimes one could keep them in the name of charity, this also requires that impossible sisters not be imposed on communities. A religious community does not have the calling to welcome persons whose personality problems risk not only the disturbance of the common life but even weigh on the service of the mission.

**It is to better live love and be more available both for fraternal life and mission that the sisters live as celibates.** One does not commit oneself because one would not be able to marry, but one wants to consecrate one's life to love. One can, in making vows, take the phrase pronounced by couples for their marriage, "*I give myself to you to faithfully love you all the days of our life.*" My heart and my body will not be for anyone but you. In the same way: "I give myself to God, and to others, to love them faithfully all the days of our life." To give myself to them, my heart and my body will not be for anyone else. As one make a covenant in marriage or through consecrated life, the same qualities are required: ability to love, to be faithful to one's gift and to be so all of one's life. There also, this ability must be measured in duration. Chastity does not reduce itself to self-restraint lived peacefully and without excessive stress, but also shows itself in the capacity for just relationships with others, keeping a safe distance, having straightforward relationships with the opposite sex without ambiguity nor prudishness, without demanding excessive affectivity or even exclusiveness, both with regard to men as well as women. There are no assurances in this area, all is risk. Things may go very well in the beginning of religious life and unravel later. But, if during the time of formation, chastity, in every sense of the word, is known by transgressions, the diagnosis for continuation is always very worrisome. If it is impossible to live chastity at the moment when one is in the best of psychological, spiritual and social conditions of living, what would happen later? Applying the principle of caution in this case is often the best decision for the interested party as well as for the community.

#### **1.4. The two sides of discernment**

Therefore one sees that discernment applies itself to two sides: is admission good for her? Is it good for us? Will she be happy with us? Will she make others happy? A certain vocational theology could favor the role of the

individual vocation shown by the interior sentiment of being called by God. This sentiment makes it a duty for the concerned authorities to call those who evidently feel so called under the pain of infidelity to God. We insisted on saying that God does not only call by interior feelings, but also exteriorly through discernment of abilities made by the competent authorities.

But exterior discernment must know how to respect interior journeys. If the person presenting herself must ask if her entrance is really the will of God for herself, those responsible in the Company must do the same and have the same availability. God alone is the master of vocations.

Even in times of shortage, one must be ready to allow to leave, without exaggerated insistence nor undue pressure, someone who seemed to have all the qualities for becoming a Daughter of Charity, who should have been a new member of choice but who does not see herself remaining and being happy. If it can be insisted upon that the decision not be made prematurely or lightly, one must know how to peacefully accept a departure when this decision becomes evident for the interested party. And even if the decision seems maladjusted or the fruit of a lack of generosity from fear or refusal to advance, it must be accepted in peace as Christ did, even if one has the right to be, like him, truly saddened by it.

Shortage should not hinder the clarity and courage to say no. Even when needs are crying out and there is a lack of personnel for the mission, it takes strength to refuse those for whom it is obvious that it is not the place for them. This is a service to the Company and often also to the one who was not made for it, even if she is not convinced of it. It is the mission that demands not engaging someone who would be more hindrance than help.

### **1.5. Leave some time for time**

This double work of discernment is not possible without the help of time. **Vocation is a story**, one that began long before entrance into postulancy and will not be completed with first vows. That is why discernment must begin well before entrance. If, within the Constitutions, postulancy is a provisional stage and easily reversed, for those that enter, and even more for those who see them enter, it is a often decisive break. Every looking back will be lived as a failure, or even in the eyes of some as cowardice of one who *“looked back after putting her hand to the plow”* or inconsistency of those responsible in lacking people and rashly refusing those who are willing to join them. One must not too quickly say: *“come and see”* and decide later. Crossing the threshold, in the eyes of those on the outside, is already to commit oneself. Therefore, a certain discernment must take place before, to see if there are reasonable chances of succeeding, if not the failure risks being dramatically lived out.

**Different stages: Postulancy, Seminary, Sending on Mission are important times of commitment for the interested persons and of discernment for the responsible authorities.** Discernment criteria are always the same but what happens over time gives more and more assurance within discernment. One can, little by little over the years, better measure the abilities of entering into the Vincentian spirit, living the demands of the vows and community life, especially the evolutions in these areas. Evolution is always decisive for discernment. If nothing moves, if no level of maturity is achieved, if one remains vague, if one has a difficult time understanding a personality and making a positive decision, those are always disturbing signs. A seminary professor said, “Every candidate to the priesthood, for whom twice as much time is spent than for the others, must be sent away immediately” and a Benedictine abbot, “If one hesitates, there is nothing to hesitate about” (meaning refusing). This is not always true and one often hesitates to be so forthright, especially in the current situation, but one often regrets not having done it. One can hope, in the beginning, for changes but, after many years, still hoping for changes that never come shows a lack of prudence. Even if one saw changes, unpleasant surprises are not impossible. Just as a balloon is able to compress itself to be put into a pipe or tubing and then take up the space and shape within the pipe, it can happen that upon leaving the tunnel of formation, those who were thought of as having been formed, quickly take on their previous form. This is not a discouragement but to recall to humility all the formators, who think of themselves as being more effective than Jesus with his Apostles.

### **1.6. Differentiating the set of actors**

**In seminaries, one always distinguishes what pertains to spiritual accompaniment (in the internal forum) and what pertains to the superior and the council members (in the external forum).** The accompanier plays a decisive role at the level of the soundness of motivations and often at the level of certain abilities that only he/she may know, particularly concerning the ability to live chastity. Because of this, in some cases, he/she may ask a candidate to stop his/her formation but without saying anything to the superior or the council. The superior and his/her council base their opinion on what they see in the seminary’s life or in the parish and come to a decision on abilities for ministry. The spiritual accompanier, in the case of a negative decision, can only accept the verdict without saying a word and help the person he directs to accept the decision.

**Is there something analogous to this for the Daughters of Charity?** I admit that I did not find a clear answer to this from the documents that were given to me. I clearly see the role of the Visitatrix and her Council which seems to me to be the council of the seminary. I see less clearly the role of the Director who seems to participate in the council meetings where he gives his opinion without being decisive. And I ask myself above all who, in the seminary, has the



role reserved for spiritual accompaniers: the one responsible for formation, the confessor, the Director? It seems to me that personal spiritual accompaniment has an essential role and that mixing the programs of interior and exterior discernment and having them done by the same person appears to me an exaggerated control of the government on the accompaniment. But my questions may be inopportune.

I have come to the end of my first talk. I am very aware of an additional gap. **I have not sufficiently taken into consideration the cultural contexts within which you exercise your mission.** Even though I lived 13 years in Africa, spent almost a year in the United States and on numerous occasions visited Colombia and Vietnam, I am situated within a European context. It is up to you to make the necessary adaptations and points of emphasis. I hardly even developed the European cultural context that nevertheless poses many questions on the life plan of the Daughters of Charity. Many think that it is not necessary to be a religious to do what the Daughters of Charity do and on the contrary their religious lifestyle imposes restraints and places them under an unacceptable supervision for today's women, and, what is more, hinders the efficaciousness of their work close to the poor. But, do they see that they live this to draw, from the source, the love necessary to fulfill this work?

**But perhaps one can criticize me for another gap? Having spoken about vocation without saying much of the God who calls.** To talk of vocation is nothing more than to seek what is his will for me. I did nothing more than to point out how to do it without any illusions. I have detailed the means to avoid illusion:

- Purify the motivations so that they meet God's ways of seeing,
- Look to see if one is able to live the mission and the way of life that Vincent de Paul, and the traditions that claim him, have assigned, through the action of the Spirit of God on the Company he founded,
- Have trust in those to whom God has confided the responsibility of knowing, yes or no, if one is able to effectively and joyfully live as a Daughter of Charity.

## 2. ACCOMPANIMENT

When the time of formation and discernment are done, all is not yet finished. On the contrary, all begins. After the calm of the harbor, one must now confront the high seas. Normally, if there is nothing more to discern, one must unceasingly verify if one is maintaining the course, changing it at times, to face storms or overcome the monotony of the days when the sea is too calm and the landscape remains constantly the same. If one has need of the attention of others

so as not to be misled, it is because we all have this need in order not to go astray. Being accompanied is necessary when one wants to live, without weakening, the religious life and it is even more so when one is given the responsibility of guiding others, if not, one risks having the blind lead the blind.

And once again I find myself before the same question that I had asked just a few moments ago. What is the Director's role in this accompaniment? Is he responsible for providing it himself or must he only make sure that it is provided? Is he first of all responsible for the accompaniment of Sister Servants? Not knowing how to respond to these questions, I will simply indicate some necessary points of attention for those who accompany and stop on some stages and situations. What I will say would apply both for the spiritual accompanier as well as anyone who plays a role in accompaniment even in other situations not to say the person responsible.

## **2.1. What is accompaniment?**

Accompanying, the word says well what it is. **Accompanying is to walk at the pace of another.** It is the other person who leads the walk and one is happy to be next to him/her to give support by our presence, give our advice on the road to follow, encouragement when weary, intervene to overcome an impasse or bring help in case of an accident. It is the presence of a friend who does not want to impose the route but offers to help in order to make a better journey. Accompaniment is not putting yourself in the place of the other, deciding for him/her but allowing the other to decide even if one feels the other may be mistaken. Accompaniment is always keeping a distance from the other: he/she is in a better position to know what is being experienced, he/she will be the one to carry the weight and the consequences of the decisions made.

And if one does this, it is not only out of respect for the person's freedom and conscience, it is out of respect for the Spirit. **Accompaniment, is to place oneself at the school of the Spirit who speaks to others.** To walk at the pace of another is to walk at the pace of the Spirit who is in the other. It is the Spirit who must indicate the path, but the Spirit speaks in the other and not in me. It is up to the other person to say what he/she is experiencing, desiring, is attracted by and not up to me to determine it for him/her. This implies, on the part of the accompanier, what St. Ignatius calls indifference: not indifference to what could happen to the other person but availability to welcome the calls of the Spirit in the other even if they throw me off course and do not correspond to what I was thinking. I do not know in advance what the Spirit may suggest to the other person, I simply remain available. Nothing is logically excluded, even that which surprises or displeases me, without having verified if this has not come, in spite of everything, from the Spirit. Accompaniment is to rid oneself of certainties, of what one believes in order to welcome the newness of the Spirit.

**Indifference does not mean inactivity.** It does not say that I accept everything that comes from the other person as coming from the Spirit. There is a discernment of the Spirit to be done. For if the Spirit can catch one unaware by certain suggestions, there is never a contradiction. The Spirit can tell one to do only what has always been said and done within the Bible, by Jesus, within the history of the Church and the saints. *“No one who speaks in the Spirit of God ever says, ‘Cursed be Jesus,’”* St. Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12:3). No one can say that the Holy Spirit inspired him/her if it leads one to do something contrary to the gospel, sowing trouble and discord, breaking up the community or to cut oneself off from the Church. It is there that our word of accompaniment must intervene to clarify, recall what has been forgotten, show what is at stake but without ever wanting to force the decision, even if it appears to us to be a poor choice.

Accompaniment is *“keeping all these things in one’s heart,”* being the memory, knowing how to remind the other where one is going, showing the road to follow, going back to the source to begin better again. Accompaniment is being there in the difficult moments, building courage when the other loses confidence, not abandoning him/her even when seeing that the other is going down a dangerous road and one does not know how to stop and hinder him/her from going any further. Accompaniment is sometimes going where one has not imagined going, where one does not want to go but where one is going so that the other is not alone. It is a leaving of oneself so that the other is not left alone.

## **2.2. The various faces of accompaniment**

**The word is rich but the task is not always easy and takes on different faces according to age and responsibilities.** Every religious has her own story but these often pass through the same stages.

**The first years of religious life are often times of enthusiasm and often times of confusion.** Enthusiasm because one can finally give oneself fully, one goes from one discover to another, one is happy to practice new strengths. Confusion because the reality is not what one imagined or that the sisters, with whom one works, do not seem to be giving of themselves as much as we are or the sisters look at us with the compassion of those who think that the other is still naive and that “it will pass.” Accompaniment must then educate one to a healthy reality, temper enthusiasm and disappointment, know how to show all that there is of generosity in what appears to be routine within older sisters, wisdom in what appears too stale, invite to patience when things are not going as quickly as one would like.

**Then things calm down.** One dreams of being different and discovers that one is still oneself, that one still finds the same difficulties in spite of all of one’s

resolutions, that all of this is wearisome. Whatever one tries does not change much, one has to live with oneself, accept oneself as is. And one must discover that what one thought was half-heartedness or weakening is really wisdom. Maturity is being at peace with one's immaturities. It is accepting oneself as God has made us for it is in this way that God loves us and it is how we really are, and not how we dream of being, that God wishes to work with us. Maturity it to mourn what we will never be able to do and what we will never be able to be. This is not laziness but wisdom. It is loving oneself as one is because God loves us in this way and wishes to use us in this way. For with who we are, God can do wonders. Not all is possible, but with what God has created within us, many things are possible.

**At times there are crises, we ask ourselves if we did right in committing ourselves on this way.** When we are at home with family, we see relatives or friends leading their lives as they wish without all the constraints that are imposed by religious life. They have children and we are alone yet we would like to hold an infant in our arms or by the hand, and hear them say mama. They live in the deep affection of a family and we find ourselves in the midst of sisters who are not always understanding. All of a sudden, everything seems dark and we begin to regret all that we are missing, forgetting all that we have gained. Sometimes we are ready to give up everything to make up for lost time, or at least to attempt a few adventures or some relaxations so as not to have lost everything. We no longer see clearly, we doubt, we feel lost. It is there that the accompanier must remain close, not denying the crisis with too pacifying pat phrases "it just a bad time you are going through, better times are coming." For the moment it is the storm and we must face it with her, not turning away from questions and doubts, allowing the other to fully express everything, to say what one would never dare say or acknowledge, even imagining the unacceptable. It is only when we have accepted to go into the depths that one can come back to the surface. This often allows one to see oneself more clearly, to lose ones illusions and to repeat a more realistic and humble yes. Would Peter have been what he became without the test of denial which made him lose all illusion about himself and all pride, but made him able to hear anew the "follow me" of Christ as he had never heard it. And if the crisis leads to foreseeing breaking off and leaving the Company, one must be yet even closer to help find again a stability in life that starts off again on other pathways.

**The crises overcome, others are brewing, one begins to sense the first effects of decline.** Health is no more what it was, more fatigue is felt, our rhythm slows: we need more time to do what we have to do and to rest after we have done it. One would like to hide all this or at least hide it from others, showing that one can still hear, see and walk as well as before, but others notice it and often make a comment to us. Soon we will be asked to give up such and such a task that was part of our life, and take retirement. One wants to back

away from the moment, afraid of not being able to be of service at all and because of this no longer being anything. The accompanier must also help in the acceptance of the inevitable. We are creatures destined to grow old and to die. This is part of life and even of spiritual life. There are times when one is given to working and times when one is given to being taken away from what one has. This time is as important as the others. Christ shows this to us in the moment when he freely gave his life to his Father, the most important moment of his life and of our salvation: *“I give you my handed-over body.”* Handed over, yes, abandoned into the hands of those who will hand him over to death but freely abandoned. *“No one takes my life but it is I who give it.”* The accompanier must also lead those whose life is being taken away bit by bit, who progressively lose their strength, hair, eyesight, use of their legs, often their minds and finally their lives so that nothing is taken away without being given: “you have given this to me, you take it back from me, I give it to you because you are asking it of me.” Aging and death are also vocations: God calls me to himself, I freely accept to join him. This accompaniment is far from being easy: one feels powerless and often clumsy. One does not know what to say or do. Often there is nothing more to do than to just be there without saying or doing anything. One must accept this powerlessness, it is nothing more than pure accompaniment. It is perhaps the moment when we can best perceive what accompaniment is before saying or doing whatever. It is first of all being there, very near, and sometimes it will be only that.

But there are not only stages to pass through, there are tasks to accomplish and tasks which necessitate accompaniment. I read that **the Director must be especially attentive to the accompaniment of Sister Servants.** The title of servant wants to be faithful to the gospel for which the command is to serve. But it is not that easy to exercise authority as a service. Firstly, because the sisters to whom authority is confided did not enter for that purpose and are often not prepared for it. It is an art that is learned with time and where balance is not easy to find. There are easy-going authorities, who let things be and only intervene when they cannot do otherwise. There are authoritarian authorities, who want to regulate everything. In the beginning, the need to assert oneself can show itself by a certain harshness or on the contrary timidity or the need to feel loved by a fear of imposing oneself. Afterwards, things can get better or get worse. There also, and more than elsewhere, whoever is the accompanier, especially if it is the Director, must respect the responsibility of the one being accompanied. He is often the only one to whom she can speak in total confidence of what she cannot confide to others. He must be very careful not to use this trust to encroach upon areas that are not his responsibility. He can counsel, warn, but it is not he who decides and bears the responsibility of the decision. To accompany is to clarify, to support, not to decide.

(Translation: Center of Translation – Daughters of Charity, Paris).