

Catholic Church

of Algeria

25 years

of grace

2000-2024

Jubilee Year

2025

Algiers, February 2026

Introduction

While reflecting as a team on the celebration of this jubilee year "Pilgrims of Hope" within the Church of Algeria, it seemed to us important both to experience the Church and at the same time to keep a tangible record of it. This is how the idea of producing a document, which would serve as the memory of the past 25 years of our Church, came about.

We began our jubilee by bringing together our thanks for the past 25 years of our lives, in Algeria or elsewhere. Each diocese and each parish were able to experience this by adapting the proposal to its own reality. But it seemed important to us to be able to collect the testimonies of people who lived in Algeria between 2000 and 2025, or at least a good portion of these years.

We thus collected around forty texts, of varying lengths (2 to 12 pages), totalling approximately 250 pages. Several people we contacted did not respond to our request for various reasons, not necessarily explained. Some, due to their age, were no longer really able to write. Others did not see the point, or did not take the time to do it. For one or two, it was painful to revisit certain moments of the period in question. We may also have overlooked one or two witnesses. We thank them for forgiving us.

Upon reading them, the collected testimonies strike us as valuable and attest to the diversity of our Church. At the same time, because of their great variety and often very personal style, they did not seem publishable to us as they were, at least

during the lifetime of the individuals. We therefore proposed to revisit these testimonies from three different perspectives: historical, theological, and spiritual.

To do this, we called upon people with some experience of our Church, that is, those who had spent a good part of the years 2000-2024 in it, several of whom had written their own testimonies. In this way, we gathered four texts: a historical review conducted by PS Henia, Hubert Le Bouquin, and Jose Maria Cantal Rivas; a theological review carried out by Guy Sawadogo and Ricardo Jimenez; and two spiritual reviews, done by Gosia Jabłońska and Valérie Kaboré.

The historical review first presents an overview of the recent history of the Church in Algeria, with some general considerations and a few key dates. It then revisits the testimonies, highlighting their diversity, the significance of the changes experienced during the period, the special role of personal relationships and friendship, of which our 19 blessed are particular witnesses, and the emergence of Christian vocations among Algerians. There is therefore a heritage to be preserved, including a theological one, but for what purpose?

This is where the second text, theological and even more specifically ecclesiological, finds its relevance. Rooted in the previous period, it offers us a vision of the Church in Algeria, in relation to the universal Church, showing how much our Church belongs to its time: a Church of encounter, in a minority context, a community of worshippers among worshippers, a modest presence of the Kingdom through living witnesses, calling for

conversion and reconciliation. The text concludes with some perspectives for the mission of the Church today.

"How should the mission be carried out today?" could be the next question. The two spiritual reinterpretations provide us with some elements of answers, while attempting to highlight the spiritual attitudes reflected in the testimonies.

The first offers us a path to unify our lives through simplification, which involves accepting ourselves through others, living in fraternity, and, recognizing the presence of the Spirit at work, journeying together, with others, in the presence of God.

The second invites us to start by living with the people of the country while weaving fraternity within the Church, practicing hospitality and dialogue, in order to embrace the Church's universal vocation. This second text concludes by suggesting a few challenges for today, such as remaining in gratitude, sharing in our diversity, to embrace the future and its inevitable transitions to be experienced.

The Interdiocesan Team for the 2025 Jubilee

Historical review

« These last 25 years in Algeria
and for the Church of Algeria»

The authors

Hubert LE BOUQUIN was born in 1955 in Saïda, Algeria. A French Capuchin friar and priest, he arrived in Algeria in 2006 with two other friars in Tiaret, serving as the pastor of a Christian community made up of many sub-Saharan students. He was the vicar general of the bishop of Oran for six years, and since 2024 he has been assigned from his community in Tiaret to Beni Abbès, where he lives with Raymond Gonnet, a Spiritan.

Little sister HENIA DE JESUS was born in 1960 in Poland. She arrived in Algeria in Touggourt in 1987 as a postulant and joined the Nomadic Fraternity of El Abiodh Sidi Cheikh until 1993. Since 2000, she has lived in Algiers, Touggourt, Béni Abbès, and Oran, with various jobs: cook in a brick factory, receptionist in a clinic, mistress of novices, regional manager, or simply in charge of the daily running of the house, as she is today in Touggourt.

José María CANTAL RIVAS was born in Granada, Spain in 1967. A White Father, he arrived in Algeria in 2002, after 5 years in Burkina Faso. He studied classical Arabic and then led the Biomedical Library of Oran. Provincial for Tunisia and Algeria, he was a member of Ribât Essalam and launched the project 'School of Difference.' Holding a master's degree in Emotional Intelligence, he served as rector of the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa in Algiers. He is currently in the Saharan city of Adrar.

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1. SOME LANDMARKS FOR THE YEARS 2000-2025

1.1 ***Some Preliminary Considerations***

The elders who lived through the Algerian War of Independence and the early years of independence are gradually disappearing. They were very involved in Algerian society through work, some with significant responsibilities. Algeria, which trained its own leaders and became organized, no longer needs these outsiders. A generation of new bishops (Gabriel Piroird, Paul Desfarges, Alphonse Georger, Henri Teissier, Claude Rault) has replaced the emblematic figures of the post-independence Church (Cardinal Duval, Jean Scotto, Bertrand Lacaste, Georges Mercier).

Since 2006, visas have become increasingly difficult to obtain for members of the Church. During these same years, more and more African students have come to strengthen Christian communities, and parishes are becoming increasingly ecumenical. Student ministry is becoming an important aspect of the Church's work: Taizé-Tlemcen, JAJ (Algerian Youth Days), and Summer University are evidence of this dynamic. At the same time, many migrants are also becoming regular parishioners in our churches, particularly in the major cities in the North. Several members of the Church are mobilized to support these people in connection with Algerian associations. Prison pastoral care also involves many of the Church's staff members.

A new generation of Church staff is arriving and must find its place within both the Church and Algerian society, with new models to be discovered. Some are happily inventing new, more

informal ways of being present in Algerian society (hiking trips in Oran, schools for diversity, cultural initiatives, AVS training, BAFA programs...). The Church institutions that could be called 'meeting platforms' (libraries, women's training centres, which represent a significant part of the Church's involvement in Algerian society in particular—but not exclusively—for women's communities) are being put in question. Language training centres are expanding. In the South, support for children with disabilities is developing (Aïn Sefra, El Menea…). The Focolare Movement organizes Mariapolis in Tlemcen, bringing together many Algerian Muslim families.

In those years, several Church establishments had to close due to a lack of personnel: El Abiodh, Chechar, Ghazaouet, Kouba... Religious communities that had been very important disappeared from the Algerian ecclesial landscape (Sisters of Christian Doctrine, Dominicans, both male and female…) or dwindled (Little Sisters and Little Brothers of Jesus and of the Gospel, priests of Pontigny). At the same time, new communities, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, arrived (FCIM, Notre Dame du Lac, SIC, SAB, PIME men and women, Capuchins, Marist brothers, Notre Dame de la Salette…) and allowed presences that had been abandoned in the 1990s to be reinvigorated, as is the case in Tiaret. In the North, local people began coming to the Church (divine surprise…) which challenges us.

1.2 ***Some key dates***

1999: Law on Civil Concord aimed at reintegrating into civilian life those who have expressed their willingness to

renounce armed violence.

2000: Algeria is just emerging from the Black Decade. Gradually, security returns to the country. But people remain affected, and security-minded reflexes persist here and there.

2004: Interdiocesan assembly under the title 'To what new spiritual and apostolic stages are we called as the Church of Algeria?' Death of Bishop Michel Gagnon (Laghouat-Ghardaïa): replaced by Bishop Claude Rault.

2005: Beatification of Charles de Foucauld, on November 13 in Rome

2006: Promulgation of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, intended to close the Black Decade.

2006-07: Decrees on non-Muslim worship are published and implemented. They seem to limit the Church's possibilities for action. Evangelical Christians are harassed, even imprisoned. A priest is sentenced to 6 months suspended prison. Some are harassed and accused by certain sections of the press of proselytizing.

2008: Interdiocesan Session of Ordained Ministers (SIMO). Bishop Ghaleb Bader, a Jordanian, is appointed Archbishop of Algiers (until 2015), replacing Archbishop Teissier.

2009: Bishop Paul Desfarges replaces Bishop Gabriel Piroird as bishop of Constantine and Hippo.

2010: Completion of the restoration project of the Basilica of Notre Dame d'Afrique, with part of the funding provided by Algeria.

2013: Completion of the restoration project of the Basilica of St. Augustine (Annaba), with part of the funding provided by Algeria. Bishop Jean-Paul Vesco replaces Bishop Alphonse Georger as bishop of Oran.

2014: Interdiocesan Assembly of Algeria (AIDA) carefully prepared, resulting in a collection of testimonies from numerous Christians in Algeria reflecting on the account of the pilgrims to Emmaus.

2017: End of the restoration project of Notre Dame de Santa Cruz in Oran, with part of the funding provided by Algeria. At Algeria's proposal, the UN General Assembly unanimously declared on December 8th that May 16th will be "World Day of Living Together in Peace". This proposal was supported by the Sufi Tariqa Alaouiya, whose headquarters is in Mostaganem.

Bishop John MacWilliam replaces Bishop Claude Rault as bishop of Laghouat-Ghardaïa.

2018: Celebration of the beatification of Pierre Claverie and his companions at Notre Dame de Santa Cruz in Oran, in the presence of representatives of the Algerian authorities. Gradual closure, over the following years, of all Protestant places of worship.

2019: The Hirak disturbs the social and political landscape of Algeria, giving rise to great hopes.

2020: Covid-19 causes Algeria to close its doors to new students from sub-Saharan Africa. They return in smaller numbers, starting from 2024, increasingly coming from English-speaking countries.

In December, the death of Bishop Henri Teissier.

Bishop Nicolas Lhernould bishop of Constantine from 2020 to 2024.

2021: Bishop Jean-Paul Vesco is appointed Archbishop of Algiers.

2022: Closure of CARITAS Algeria on September 30 by order of the Algerian authorities. Canonisation of Saint Charles de Foucauld, on May 15 in Rome.

2023: Archbishop Jean-Paul Vesco receives Algerian nationality.

2024: Ordination of Davide Carraro as Bishop of Oran. The country is increasingly turning towards the English-speaking world, which signals an impact on the life of our Church. On December 7, Archbishop Jean-Paul Vesco is made cardinal by Pope Francis in Rome.

2025: Episcopal ordinations of Bishop Diego Sarrió Cuccarella (Laghouat-Ghardaïa) and Bishop Michel Guillaud (Constantine and Hippo).

Pope Leo XIV publicly announces his desire to visit Algeria.

2. SOME KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TESTIMONIES

2.1 ***Personal and unique stories***

First of all, we must thank all those who took the time to write about how they have experienced these past 25 years. We can only give thanks to God for the diversity of the members of our Church and the passion displayed, in many ways, to live the

Gospel in Algeria. This is already a first observation: great diversity within a shared faithfulness to the call to come to Algeria. For some, this call came to disrupt a completely different life plan; for others, it confirmed the 'little signs' received during the long period leading up to their arrival in Algeria. This divine call to live here as a disciple of Christ is a second observation common to all. And for the children of the country, it is also the call to continue living in their homeland. For everyone, personal vocation and life in this Algerian land ultimately turn out to be two sides of the same coin.

All the authors of the testimonies used the first-person singular with honesty and courage. Some explicitly mentioned names and places of suffering, misunderstanding, and human and institutional failures. However, no one expressed their thoughts with bitterness or malice, but rather with a clear desire to draw attention to or to reveal what was a wound or a shadow. Only one person spoke of a lack of freedom to express themselves in the Church (is that proof that there isn't any?).

2.2 ***Twenty-five years of changes***

One of the most commonly used words is 'change': in the country, traditions, the world, the components of our communities, relations with authorities, Islam (popular or official), mission theology, modes of interaction, personal development (professional, ecclesial, and spiritual journeys), etc. These 'changes' have sometimes been endured, sometimes anticipated or accompanied, or simply integrated gradually, but rarely resisted… Looking back over the past quarter of a century, all observers seem to accept the current outcome of all

these changes, both in the country and in our communities, without qualms or nostalgia for the past (except perhaps regarding the difficulty of finding professional opportunities in society and the decline in the level of Arabic within our communities).

Among these 'changes,' there is one that is often mentioned: the Church's permanent members now almost all come from the South. However, 25 years ago, there were a few religious figures who were already in Algeria and who were not of Western culture. Only two of them have presented writings. Perhaps the others were asked and did not have the time to write a few lines. But even now, it would be enriching to hear how they experienced the transition from 'minority' to 'normality.'

2.3 ***The privileged place of personal relationships and friendship***

In all narratives, there is a significant portion devoted to friends, relationships, and the circle of people with whom one has shared work, emotional bonds, moments of joy or family mourning, and so on. For all authors, these people and the connections formed are far from being mere extras in a setting where the main action happens elsewhere (such as their integration, for example). All these people, faces, and relationships are seen as part of the reasons to stay, to serve, to endure, to hope, to plead, and to praise God. These many faces seem to have had, everywhere and for everyone, a beneficial effect regarding loyalty to this country and its Church. Through them, many see themselves as happy disciples of Christ. Some

will speak of the 'sacrament of friendship.' But these friendly and gratuitous connections have often allowed people to speak, express, and share what has been liberated by the presence of a benevolent otherness, which led someone to say: "I am a sacred person."

According to testimonies, there is therefore a double fertilization: 1. that which is produced in the other by a lasting and trusting presence, sincerely devoted and without ulterior motives, which allows the emergence of a hidden part of their personality and spirituality; 2. and, simultaneously, the long and demanding maturation of a re-reading of the entire Christian tradition in the light of this love for Muslim individuals. Everyone seems to have benefited! In the chapter on friendships, there are several mentions of the role of the (older) members in compiling this capital of trust and the connections already created and discovered upon arrival.

And this mutual enrichment seems so essential that one comes to regret that the new generations might not perceive the theological richness of these friendly ties. This is not a reproach, but a wish that newcomers may understand what has been the backbone of a lifelong commitment.

2.4 *Some more specific considerations*

Some of the witnesses claim that the 19 Blessed constitute a common foundation for all the members of our Church… and they remind us that they were not beatified because of their works, but because of the bonds they formed as Christians with this people.

All the witnesses say they have seen civil society and Islam become increasingly closed off (“traditionalized”) over the past 25 years. During this period, the authorities have shown fluctuating attitudes. But in a fractured society that no longer believes in itself, “my presence helps to imagine another world.”

The personal questions that led Algerians to follow Christ are mentioned by the elders as 'unimaginable 50 years ago.' At the same time, those who have shared their faith journeys described it as the response to an inner calling that the Church only helped channel. It did not provoke it. But these paths to Christ do not seem to have been understood or supported, both in the past and in the present. The elders claim to have moved past the dilemma (still present until recently): 'Am I here for Muslims or for Christians?' The younger ones simply observe a greater presence of Algerians in various pastoral activities and bodies. Some mention the various Protestant currents as having, de facto, an impact on our life as Christians in this country.

Several fathers and mothers have taken part in this exercise. Among others, there are laypeople and religious men and women, brothers and sisters! And if there was a question about the role and place of laypeople in our Church, someone (who is not a priest!) affirms that the priesthood of the faithful makes Christ truly present in many places.

Everyone expresses their joy in being part of this Church, small and diverse, rooted in a people: all know that the Kingdom is greater than the Church, which is a sign of its coming.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

So far, the model of the Church proposed to newcomers has been that of a Church inspired by the Second Vatican Council and fairly 'French.' Some people are asking, quite radically, whether in the future anyone will come to sustain the Christian presence in this land. Others would like the legitimate 'claim for a place' by some to be accompanied, at least in part, by learning from the experience of those who came before.

Overall, the question is: into what model of Church are newcomers invited to enter?

All the witnesses who have come to Algeria say that they have grown over the years by taking on very varied ministries and experiences. Looking at their present, they seem more flexible and willing to offer any service to the Church of Algeria. For them, the Eucharist is a path to the Kingdom open to all those to whom they are sent.

Both Algerians and foreigners unanimously agree on the strong bonds that exist between all the people of the country and their faith in Christ. They owe this to the fortune of having endured in the country.

And without being able to say that there is "an Algerian school of theological thought," one can say, by reading the testimonies presented, that as a community of Christians, they have managed to develop a true theology and a rich rereading of the Gospel in a country with a Muslim tradition.

Little Sister Henia, B. Hubert Le Bouquin,
F. José María Cantal Rivas

Theological and ecclesiological review

« Responding to the situation of the Church and Christianity in Present-Day Algeria »

The authors

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Guy SAWADOGO was born in 1981 in Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). A Missionary Priest of Africa (White Father), he arrived in Algeria in 2005 for 2 years in Ghardaïa. After his theological studies, he joined Tizi Ouzou in 2011, where he was in charge of the library "Le Figuier" and then became the parish priest. After 2 years of anthropology studies in Lyon, he returned in 2022 to the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa (Algiers) and works at the diocesan centre "Les Glycines," which he took charge of in 2023.

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1. INTRODUCTION

We were inspired by three texts from CERNA, which have accompanied the Churches of the Maghreb countries since they gained their independence, texts that are quite different, but that share a common thread for understanding our Churches in North Africa:

- Christians in the Maghreb. The meaning of our meetings (November 15, 1979)

- The Churches of the Maghreb in the Year 2000 (January 2000)

- Servants of Hope. The Catholic Church in the Maghreb Today (December 1, 2014)

Other texts, such as the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (2019), the Abu Dhabi document, help and accompany reflection on our life here.

This year, 2025, a commission made up of members from the four dioceses of Algeria asked us to review and create a theological synthesis of personal and collective "stories," around the Jubilee of Hope. Each testimony aimed to respond to the situation of the Church and Christianity in present-day Algeria. One testimony states: "We have to respond to it personally and inwardly, because they (the questions) help us to be clear about the reason and purpose of our presence in Algeria."

These are testimonies from people who have lived through the main part of the period 2000-2024, in Algeria, within our Church. What we present is in the realm of ecclesiology, with its nuances that explain the various upheavals and changes in

pastoral perspective and rootedness in the country. The points raised question our faith and our Christian presence in Algeria.

Fifteen years ago, in 2010, the Church Reflection Group in Algeria (GREA) had drafted The New Conditions of Mission in Algeria. This paragraph from the document is still relevant in addressing this attempt to reread these more than 250 pages of testimonies:

"We do not believe that this dual call of the text from the year 2000—to live 'a church of encounter' and 'a church as sacrament' (sign and means, despite or because of its numerical and institutional fragility)—will change tomorrow. But it is our task in this text to try to identify and embrace the times to come as moments of renewal of people within the Church and, consequently, a probable transition in our witness. At least three phases have marked the time of the Church since Independence in 1962: we are not a colonial remnant, we were born from a founding act, from Cardinal Duval's call to stay here, and even to come here; followed by a period of ardent service to the development of the country, and then tragic times of solidarity in suffering. But what would characterize us now are, both in the masculine and the feminine, these new men who are coming, these Christians from the South who are passing through, these new Christians who are being born. How will they, together, form the Church of encounter, and the Church as sacrament? And this in an Algerian context where, on the one hand, foreign influences from the global economy in crisis and the uncertain upheavals of Islam are intermingled, and on the other hand, the growing internal pressure of a people doubting themselves and their future. This question explains our plan: what kind of Algeria calls us or provokes us? What new face does our diversity take in the Church? Are certain pastoral choices to be adjusted?

The term inflection corresponds exactly to these different surges in ecclesial life in the country. It is these inflections that show the vitality of the Christian presence in the Church in Algeria, in companionship with the population, mostly Muslim.

2. THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL INFLECTIONS

The Church in Algeria has faced significant theological and ecclesial questions. In 2000, the Church 'emerged from the catacombs' after the difficult years of terrorism. It testified to its attachment to the country and its people. It paid the price of martyrdom. This national tragedy showed that the Church in Algeria is not just a gathering of believers and practicing Christians; it is the presence of Christians who are sent as witnesses of Christ and in His Spirit to all Algerians, regardless of their religion. Christians in Algeria have shared in their flesh the experiences of all the inhabitants, and we, as Christians today, feel that we are heirs of this experience.

After reading dozens of testimonies from different dioceses and various individuals (students, Algerian Christians, Algerian Muslims, Christians in prison, people in migration, expatriates, religious men and women, laypeople, priests, etc.), we perceive that throughout history, theological and ecclesiological shifts emerge across these testimonies and attempt to answer the questions: What are our personal milestones during this period 2000-2025? What are the new challenges for our Church today? It is these shifts that we share in this essay of review, reflection, and writing.

3. 3. A Church of Its Time

3.1 *A Church of Witnesses: Figures of Holiness*

Our Church in Algeria has been marked, over the last quarter of a century, by figures of holiness, notably by historical figures who continue to be cited (Saint Augustine and Saint Charles de Foucauld), others who have been involved in the country's changes (Cardinal Duval, Archbishop Teissier, etc.), and the figures of the martyrs of the 1990s who have shaped the spirit of the Church since their beatification. Some testimonies evoke spiritualities connected to founding saints (Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, etc.). This Church of witnesses gives meaning and deepens our presence.

The Church of witnesses is formed by the martyrs and by so many anonymous Christians, mostly laypeople. The 19 martyrs of the 1990s are a source of joy and consolation; they are a source of inspiration and a call, even a challenge to reflect on how we live as Christians in the country. The history of the Church in Algeria is the history of its martyrs, going back to the figures of the early centuries (Saint Salsa, etc.). In the history of the Church in Algeria, there is a concern for transmission and for building such bridges that demonstrate the rooting of the Church and Christianity in the North African region. The Church has always been called to serve its people, who do not leave it indifferent. Christian Salenson writes, 'This Church revealed by the martyrs of Algeria' (Sept 2010), speaking of the martyrs of the 1990s:

"They inaugurate an original form of holiness, involving new paths of sanctity that are unsettling: renunciation of proselytism and respect for Muslims."

3.2 ***A Church as the Presence of the Kingdom***

Reflections on relationships based on generosity and openness to others are very frequent. The Church of Algeria is often mentioned in terms of the kind of relationships it establishes with Algerian men and women. It is an oasis in this land of Islam. The Church is strongly identified as a 'presence of the Church'.

The Church is a presence of the Kingdom*,* a seed of the Kingdom, a presence among the local population. It is *the presence of the firstborn of a multitude of brothers.* The quality of our relationships plays a significant role in this. We can be signs of reconciliation and mercy. The quality of human relationships constitutes the DNA of our Church. The presence of Christ and His Kingdom is sought within relational networks, and the Church tries to live from within the local culture. Christ is this Presence of God in every person. The mission and life of the Church are lived with others, in connection and mutual communion. The quality of relationships can be experienced as a ***'sacrament of friendship****,'* as Bishop Teissier said. “The Word became a brother,” said Christian de Chergé. Living universal brotherhood is a daily calling, and this is what the current Archbishop of Algiers, Cardinal Vesco, regularly invites us to. In this connection between Church and Kingdom, “anonymous Christians” participate and are actively supportive in the services and spaces of the Church. There is a lived depth that

shows that the sacramental presence of Jesus is revealed among this population.

3.3 ***A Church of Encounter***

We are entering a complex society. Algeria is a complex country, and the Christian community, made up of both locals and foreigners, lives within a given culture. This Algerian society is primarily marked by Amazigh, Arab, and French heritage, but also by Turkish-Ottoman influences, among others. This explains the multiplicity of local and regional cultures. The languages spoken also reflect the country's cultural diversity.

In our weekly or diocesan gatherings, multiculturalism is palpable. This is demanding and requires special attention to others. On this topic, we can include efforts to use different languages in gatherings: Tamazight, Arabic, French, English, and other languages. The effort of inculturation is in the spirit of Christians. Discovering others in their otherness calls for openness. We are a Church of encounters with men and women who carry a culture within them.

The Church of Encounter takes on its full meaning. The Church is clearly universal, that is to say, diverse and welcoming of differences. It is first constituted by its Algerian identity, with the Christians of the country, and by the faithful coming from other African countries and other regions of the world (students, people in migration, expatriates, etc.).

This Church of Encounter promotes learning from the experiences of others, from all walks of life, and we discover that there are encounters that change lives, as we experience

generosity and inner openness towards others, from which hope and a life given can be reborn in the resonance of personal experience. Encounter is hospitable. Hospitality is deeply rooted as a fundamental value in Algerian society. This value helps us better understand the depth of Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. These two women welcome each other, knowing that each carries the presence of the Spirit.

The presence of the culture of the other and of Algerian culture in particular raises two questions: what does this tell me about humanity? What does this tell me about God? These two questions help to open a Christological reflection rooted in our time. The testimonies express the ways in which encounters take place, all different from one another, and experienced as moments of gratuity. In an attitude of openness, welcome, and an inner disposition to reach out to others and to what touches us in them, when an encounter occurs, we can allow ourselves to be transformed by what happens between us. For gratuity is something that cannot be commanded; it cannot be forced or manufactured. Some express a trust in the possibility of living together.

The Church in Algeria is inevitably influenced by the presence of Islam, the faith of Muslims, and the place of Islam in God's plan. Encountering this different other, far from relativizing one's own faith, deepens it. How can an Algerian live with the tension between Church and family while remaining faithful to a mission that is specific to us: meeting and bearing witness with the Algerian Muslim world?

3.4 *A Catholic Church with an ecumenical and intercultural vocation*

Catholics, as well as Christians of other denominations who participate in the life of the Church, come from many different countries and cultures. A multicultural and intercultural reality is present in our various gatherings. There is truly a daily ecumenical practice in our lives. This is a reality that invites us to reflect on our ways of doing things, to work on other grounds of understanding, and to continuously make personal and communal adjustments. This multicultural ecclesial reality today expresses human and spiritual richness, a solidarity among different peoples. Our Church and Christian communities are an expression of the Pentecost experience, where diverse peoples heard the same language, that of the Spirit of God.

3.5 *A Church: a community of worshippers among worshippers*

The Church in Algeria can also be defined as a community of prayerful people among other prayerful people. We witness the faith of the Muslims. The five calls to prayer unite us through the sound they evoke. It is their prayer that we often hear and in which we participate 'unconsciously.' Prayer is a source of closeness to Jesus Christ and a source of inspiration in our desire for inculturation and participation in the life of the country. We wish to pray with other believers, with the same fervor and intensity.

We bear witness to who we are when we pray together, in assembly, in communion, in interaction. Prayer builds

community, and in this, it draws the respectful attention of the Muslim community. Living with Muslim believers can enrich our spiritual experience. We are convinced that God dwells in the hearts of the people of this country and that through them, He reveals His wisdom to us. Their faith, simplicity, and devotion to God inspire us and help us remain faithful to Christ. We are supported, without their intending it, by their daily prayer rhythm.

We are aware that our Church is a community of Christian believers. In this regard, we particularly mention the testimonies of students, brothers and sisters in migration, and people in prison. They have a simple and committed fervour. They also teach us a personal way of approaching the mystery of God. These groups of people intensify their prayer in Algeria, feeling the need to come together to pray and invoke the name of Jesus Christ, Savior of all. They are a reflection of the holiness of ordinary life (Gaudete et Exultate, March 2018). They can also show us the path of a particular devotion.

3.6 *A Church with a missionary vocation*

The Church in Algeria feels missionary, in the sense of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in the countries and regions where it is sent. The members of this Church, especially the new permanent members, have a missionary awareness. They feel more clearly sent to a land of Mission. It is a Church responding to a call, to a vocation. To live there happily, one must feel the call of the Lord, the call of the country, the call of the Church, the call of the mission. By feeling ourselves as missionaries, we are constantly seeking the meaning of our mission. This can

sometimes cause a sense of disorientation, but it can also be a source of inspiration. For many, it is clear that the vocation of this Church in Algeria is to live in fraternity with the Algerian people, where living together is evident.

3.7 *A Minority Church*

The Church in Algeria is a minority Church, marked by humility, simplicity, fragility, and discretion, with an uncertain future. By being active in various services for the country, benefiting different groups (children, youth, students, prisoners, or people on the move, etc.), it sees itself as a 'small Church,' 'a Church in the manger,' serving a minority Christianity, and serving a population of Muslim faith. This aspect of our Church is a source of inspiration for many people. It is a prophetic sign. Our Church reflects the small nativity scene of Bethlehem: a birth in humility. For many, it is about fully realizing their Christian vocation here. Our mission is carried out in the service of non-Christians, namely Muslims, preferably with the poorest and the youth of the country. The spiritual meaning of this awareness leads us to say that we can carry Jesus in our inner tabernacle. In this smallness, through the table of encounter, we discover the path to the table of the Eucharist.

3.8 *A Church as an Archetypal Community of Reconciliation*

The Church in Algeria participates in the life of the country, in the desire to rebuild, to trust itself, to believe in itself. Within it, disciples of Christ were born and discovered it. In this sense, it is a citizen Church on the move, serving Algerian society. It more broadly participates in the path of reconciliation. All our places

where Christians are active, such as Tibhirine, Notre Dame d'Afrique in Algiers, Saint Augustine in Annaba, but also places of meetings and services, are archetypes of memory, reconciliation, and healing of oneself and society. It is a Church driven by a very strong hope, forged in the sufferings shared with Muslim friends. The time of the 'black decade' has anchored the Church in this country.

The Church, through its activities, helps each person to discover themselves and to reconcile with themselves: it is a place of reconciliation, where differences, fractures, and similarities coexist. Participating in the rebuilding of oneself to better build society, through the services provided by the Church, through the communities of priests, nuns, and laypeople. These services reveal the call to listen to and serve the poor and the most disadvantaged in society.

3.9 ***A Church on the Path of Conversion***

The Church in Algeria is shaped by the proclamation of faith, by the implicit or explicit presence of its practice, by encounter, dialogue, and proclamation. It is a Church on a journey, in conversion, in companionship with travellers, new disciples, or newly baptized. Many experience that encountering Christ is a living encounter with the One who "has transformed my life." The Lord heals inner wounds and sets us on the path of reconciliation. The Church enables personal encounters with Christ who heals, forgives, and gives trust. God restores, frees, and sends. A Church that welcomes its wounded children is a community that embodies Christ the Savior, a Church that restores broken hearts, and we witness this every day.

3.10 *A Church as a Meeting Place*

The Church is a community, but also a collection of places of presence, creation, various initiatives, expression of beauty, and personal and collective exploration. These places can give rise to "shared friendships, sought-after conviviality, respect for religious differences, open doors to any man or woman passing by...". These Church locations or sites of religious communities can become places of solidarity between Muslims and Christians. This Church presence, which might seem insignificant, nonetheless conveys all the Good News brought by Jesus of Nazareth. Places of presence, whether remote or isolated, demonstrate closeness and a quality of attentive presence.

3.11 *A Church as a Welcoming Community*

The Church in Algeria is a welcoming community. For some, the Church is a second family. It embraces its relationships and connections with Muslim Algerians, and it more clearly welcomes Algerians who wish to become disciples of Christ, through baptism or through a heart covenant with the community. The welcoming and accompaniment of new Christians is widely accepted in the pastoral work of each diocese. Naturally, we are always in the movement of 'beginning at the beginning.' Each person welcomed carries a story and a special relationship with the country, with Islam, and with their fellow citizens.

3.12 *A Church network of ecclesial and social collaboration*

The various Church structures (centres, parishes, places of worship, etc.) offer the possibility for collaboration and welcoming newcomers. Knowing that in the country, official and paid work is prohibited, new Church leaders are necessarily called upon to carry out work and a mission within the Church structures or under the supervision of a religious congregation.

4. PERSPECTIVES: THE 'MISSION' TODAY?

What hope do we carry as a Church? What are the sources of hope for the future of our Church and our country? When we talk about hope, we evoke the future. Pope Francis would say: 'Hope is always communal.' Hope hovers over this Church; it is part of its very being. The dark decade and the lives of the martyrs remind us of this.

How can we invent a new way of being Church in this Algeria that is experiencing economic growth and improvements in infrastructure, but which paradoxically continues to close in on itself more and more? Being Church today in Algeria implies:

- ***Be ready for the encounter (be present)***

Our Church in Algeria has long been able to develop attitudes of quality presence. Our 'being-there' in its various aspects should reflect this. Our pastoral engagements are places where this qualitative 'being-there' can be experienced.

- ***Be attentive to the grace of being here with our stories***

New church staff have arrived in the last quarter-century. They belong to congregations and particular churches that have much to learn from the Church in Algeria. Conversely, our Church also has much to say and to offer to these new members who are arriving. We are all thus called to be attentive to the grace of being here, to sense the needs of our Church and our environment in order to respond to them appropriately.

- ***Carry the Word that can convey joy and hope***

The Church of Algeria is a Church that has shown fraternity and closeness, especially during difficult times, a Church that has never turned its back on the happy or unhappy realities of Algeria. It wants to bring the joy of the Gospel and is present wherever it can, bringing hope to the most disadvantaged, the sick, the marginalized, and prisoners.

- ***Find our own inner bearings, our own convictions about living here***

The particularities of our Church in Algeria, in its smallness, in a Muslim environment, and in its various components, push its members to personalize their inner bearings and to develop strong missionary convictions, in order to live as true Christians.

- ***Develop a sense of mutual welcome, with patience***

We identify ourselves as a Church of encounter; this implies a sense of welcome, presence, listening, patience, and resilience. Gently, gradually, it is about setting out on a journey with the other who is different in their faith, 'believers among believers.'

- ***Work towards deeper inculturation, the true path to the Church's rooting***

Small local communities are emerging here and there in our parishes in Algeria. Perhaps the time has come to 'Algerianize' certain ecclesial practices in order to better adapt to the Christians of the country. Language plays an important role in this process. It will allow, in our daily interactions as well as in our liturgies, for the ways we address God to take on local, Algerian colours.

F. Guy Sawadogo

F. Ricardo Jimenez

Spiritual reviews

« Paths of Hope »

The author

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"Pilgrims of Hope"

A path of presence toward the Kingdom

We are beings of encounters and relationships. They form the backdrop of our identity as well as that of the stories collected on the occasion of the Jubilee.

The other holds an important place in our life, and our identity is built with others. Stepping out of oneself, both personally and within a faith community, going to meet others, engaging in dialogue with the world, with religions, with 'others,' is to follow a path of Christian salvation, through self-decentring and attentiveness to one's neighbour. This is my reflection at the end of reading the contributions.

The image that evokes for me the experience of our respective journeys is that of weaving. Both weaving and journeying take time, require patience, and are a process. The weaving of the thread is done with a back-and-forth movement that follows the needle, and the most beautiful result is obtained when threads of many different colours are woven together. This multi-coloured weaving expresses our diversity. It opens us to the dimension of hospitality, experienced and shared in our stories. It allows bonds to be formed and the community to be built. It opens the way to genuine encounters, facilitates openness beyond the faith community, fosters closeness with the Algerian population, sharing with other Christian communities, dialogue in daily life, and engagement with the issues of time and space — what the jubilee document 'Spes non confundit' invites us to do, emphasizing the

importance of discovering hope in the signs of the times. For we recognize it in events because of the relationship they have with the Kingdom of God, revealing the places where God's action takes place, bringing salvation.

In the accounts, many of us have spoken in this way about service and closeness. In the attitude of service, by drawing close to others, we discover the presence of God in the ordinary of our lives, at the heart of our lives. This is the experience of Jesus himself. During his public life, he experienced the banality of the days, in the villages of Palestine, at the pace of recurring needs—needs for bread, health, forgiveness. His presence transfigured the ordinary moments, as everything touched by love is transformed. The same is true in the parables of the Gospels, where the most familiar things, like the vineyard, the sheepfold, the drachma, or the lamp, begin to shine with a new light. By giving a voice to the everyday, the parables reveal in it a meaning: God has revealed the great things of the Kingdom not only to the little ones of this world but also in the small things of this world; many of us have experienced this throughout our lives.

We could easily make the connection here with Pope Francis' latest encyclical, 'Dilexit Nos,' when he writes:

"Our heart coexists with other hearts that help it to be a 'you'. […] For it is the heart that creates the possibilities of encounter. It is through the heart that I am at the side of the other and that the other is close to me [12]. […] In the heart of each person, there exists this paradoxical link between self-valuation and openness to the other, between the very personal encounter with oneself and the giving of oneself to the other. I only become myself when I acquire the ability

to recognize the other, and when I meet the other who can recognize and accept my identity [18]. The heart is also capable of unifying and harmonizing personal history, which seems fragmented into a thousand pieces but where everything can have meaning [19]."

When a person reflects, searches, meditates on their being and identity; when they ponder the meaning of their life and even when they seek God, if they experience the joy of having glimpsed some truth, this reaches its peak in love. In loving, the person feels that they know why and for what purpose they live. Everything thus converges towards a state of connection and harmony. This has consequences for spirituality.

These words of the Pope touch me deeply. I find in them an echo of what each of us has experienced and tried to live in Algeria, in our personal, community, or ecclesial journey over the past 25 years, and a little longer for those who were born here.

To make a spiritual reading of our respective journeys, following the thread of our stories, was the request addressed to me by the Jubilee Commission. From the outset, I can say that in our stories and testimonies, one can see several spiritual approaches and interpretations.

The word "spirituality" evokes the spirit, the deep breath that animates our bodies and makes us individuals on a path of humanization, seeking to give meaning to their lives and to the great questions that traverse them. Christian spirituality sees in it the breath of God. The Spirit continues the work of creation in the world and shapes us through evangelical contemplation. This makes us capable of perceiving the presence of God even in the most unlikely places, and of giving thanks for it. From this

perspective, spirituality is a certain way of looking at oneself and the world. Since no spirituality can grasp the whole mystery of Christ, we can speak of Christian spiritualities in the plural, each referring to an aspect of this mystery.

For my part, I asked myself about the relationship between the spiritual, or spiritual experience, and the weaving of bonds experienced in our living spaces, our encounters, and our relationships. I will therefore share how, through all the testimonies, this unfolds in several movements.

The first movement: “Receiving from others,” allowing oneself to be welcomed by others and welcoming them in return, expresses an attitude of mutual respect. This is not driven by a humanitarian aim, but, we believe, by an initiative of God, because each person receives themselves from God as infinite value: “In every nation, the one who fears Him and practices righteousness is pleasing to Him” (Acts 10:35).

In this respectful recognition, in this movement of humans as such towards one another, we perceive that fraternity takes shape in the welcome and the bonds that already weave our communities and overflow from the 'in-group,' in the generosity of relationships, the services given and received. This nourishes the desire to listen to the Spirit at work, in each person and every activity, and to become a presence—to oneself, to others, and also to the invisible. Attention, inner listening, and a benevolent gaze prepare us for the encounter with God in humanity, in an inner shift that opens our hearts to the Kingdom.

1. TO RECEIVE FROM OTHERS

"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Ex 3:5)

The other exists before we approach him. He is marked by a personal history. He is embedded in a network of relationships that demand from him a certain type of behaviour, the deeper meaning of which may elude us if we are not sufficiently attentive, because he is constrained to play a role in the environment in which he lives. To meet him, we are first invited not to cut through this complexity, to allow him to exist before us as he is, without making hasty judgments, without imposing on him the norms of our preconceived ideas or our system of interpretation, without trying to fit him into our plans, our concerns, or our desires.

To go toward meeting the other, to visit them and let them visit us, several of us have highlighted the importance of accepting who each person is, in all the complexity of their history, origins, upbringing, and even their wounds and limitations. To make ourselves attentive to the simple existence of others, it is important to bring clarity to ourselves as individuals, to be truthful about who we are, and to ensure that we make choices based on or through the calls we have experienced in our own lives. For this allows us to be truly open to encountering and welcoming the other.

The 'Visitation' in which Mary visits Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56) is an excellent example of an encounter that brings mutual joy and liberation. This special moment shared by these two

women opens up opportunities for free expression, welcoming kindness, and attentive listening.

Allowing oneself to be touched and welcomed by another, and welcoming them in return, in an attitude of reciprocity, allows the word of God to become incarnate within us. For it is about welcoming the other, freely and generously, and sometimes without limit. This requires making silence within oneself because one first accepts not to understand, not to know, not to know everything. It is an experience of the heart, because the heart has reasons that reason cannot explain. It sometimes requires courage and forces us to question ways of being and doing that were familiar to us or that we considered 'normal' because they were valued by many people.

Several accounts reflect these fundamentals.

“In this multi-coloured landscape, we are all made of the same substance with our different mentalities and races. My deep desire is to be welcomed and loved by the Algerians, who often have little self-esteem. This desired closeness does not come without cracks. Too often, I forget that the land of the other is sacred. I am very fortunate to have endured in this context. This companionship is what gives meaning to my life as a Christian woman, being with Jesus while living with others who do not know Him. Loving each other gives us LIFE; this is part of the Good News! This work of deciphering and reviewing the presence of the Spirit is vital for me. May I be this heart that knows how to receive a human word in resonance with the Word of God, that knows how to gather the revelation that God sends me there, in the words of a people where the Word also dwells and quietly takes root. As

Christian de Chergé said: "There is a mysterious plan of God for the people of Islam, a temple of His Presence where He invites me to enter."

Thus, the Word continues its course. Scripture is our nourishment, the Eucharistic Bread and the shared bread of our gatherings help us to sharpen our ears and perceive, in the conversations and experiences we have, the echo of God's voice that never stops speaking and the response we give Him, as expressed in the testimonies that follow.

"Everything happens when people can take the time, truly welcome each other, and speak to each other with trust. This way of being and doing resonates with me and stimulates me. Each person can choose their own path, their mode of expression, their style, their particular way of participating in the life of the groups to which they belong and in that of their country. And this is based primarily on the possibility of encountering others beyond any preconceived ideas, barriers, or interpretive frameworks. I have learned and experienced this over the past 25 years in the Church and in daily interactions with Algerians. My bonds of friendship and fellowship have been strengthened by it. (…) "The spirit of Encounter," which often flourishes in Brotherhood, gives me deep satisfaction and great peace. Thanks to its influence on my inner and relational life, my connection to my country and my profound desire to respond to the Beauty of the world and to embody as best I can what has called me for a long time have been unified in me: the life of Jesus and His Word. "

"In our context, which is predominantly non-Christian, I think we would gain a lot by remembering that we must first continue in our daily lives the work of Christ for our contemporaries."

"What gave meaning and unified my life was continuing Jesus' mission wherever I was, with the people I met, to whom I could, like HIM and in HIS place, give more life, help people grow, foster more fraternity, more communion, more reconciliation."

The presence of the other gives life its taste. It continually invites us to step outside ourselves and to find signs of love, through actions, words, in conversation or in prayer, that ensure the presence of the Other. This has allowed some to experience something of creative love: each person exists when they begin to exist for someone, when they enter into a relationship where they are acknowledged.

"Isn't every encounter with true humanity already good news? In these encounters, we do not part as we do after merely greeting each other. I like to see the signature of the Holy Spirit in them. Even with few words, we tell each other: your life does me good, I am happy to meet you. Isn't that already good news, a visitation? I often experience this with emotion today."

“The essential thing in my mission as a Franciscan nun and member of the Church of Algeria is to allow the other person to give of themselves, to give the other person the opportunity to express the joy of giving. This requires a certain humility, in order to reach the heart of the other.”

For those we meet, the Good News of the Kingdom first lies in the fact that we lend them a listening and caring ear. Our

places of presence can also become a sign of reconciliation. Thus, welcoming visitors to Tibhirine, whether Christian or Muslim, is meaningful. In the living and serene memory of the self-giving life of the monks, and in the friendship of the Algerian people, it allows us to be a ferment of peace and reconciliation for each other, both individually and collectively. The spirituality of forgiveness and reconciliation is one of the important aspects in the continuity of our mission in Algeria.

2. LIVING FRATERNITY

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

The Kingdom of God is approaching when there is more brotherhood in our relationships, more coherence in our various structures and communities. It is a sign that this communion is on its way. And at the same time, we must continually deepen our relationship with the Lord, to see that we can, in our places of life, quench our thirst for communion, for brotherhood, for forgiveness. In the narratives, the thirsts expressed are multiple.

First, there is the thirst for mutual understanding among all of us, in the Church, for more fraternal life, conviviality, sharing, and meeting. There is the thirst to celebrate in the ordinary days or during key moments to recharge ourselves. Above all, there is the thirst to live a community experience that truly speaks to us of communion.

Here comes the thirst for learning: to understand, discover, and experiment, to know better in order to move forward and

nourish one's faith. And the quest for prayer to deepen our relationship with the Lord, this "Teach us to pray" from the disciples to Jesus. There is also expressed the need to be accompanied in order to progress, and the need to share with others to grow in faith, support one another fraternally, and live this communion of prayer that speaks to us of the communion of saints. In Algeria, we have several sources of inspiration and several spiritual figures to nurture our faith. Some have thus mentioned our 19 Blessed, Saint Augustine, Saint Charles de Foucauld, and the patron saints of our Congregations and Institutes.

How then can we respond to these desires, these needs and thirsts, so that the relational fabric expands, and so that we may be brothers and sisters to one another? Some emphasize the importance of fully experiencing, personally or in community, all the opportunities for sharing that are offered to them, for example through reading and studying the Bible together, theological reflection groups, prison visitor groups, or others. The Church, as a community of faith and sharing, is the environment where everyone can draw on fraternal support to find their way and overcome judgments and resentments in personal and/or community reconciliation. Through listening, meditation, and the sharing of Scripture, the process of bringing the relationship into truth and deepening it continues.

A testimony tells us: 'It helped me grasp the unity of my life: in the light of the biblical and theological training organized by the diocese (…) I finally came to understand that I did not have two lives: one life for the Christian world, during the weekends,

prayer times with the sisters, or meetings, and another life, on weekdays, with the Muslim world, my students, and my fellow teachers.'

Other meeting places, within our commitments and institutions, in our neighbourhoods and cities, serve the cause of fraternal life, responding to this thirst for sharing and celebration with the Algerian people. Many have mentioned meeting platforms such as the University Cultural Centre in Algiers, the Ciara (former training centre, now closed), the Maison de Ben Smen, the Nibras and Dilou Centres in Constantine, the libraries in Oran and in the South, and many other places for sharing life, training, and support. Algerians, mostly Muslims, gather there and make these places points of reference for their human and spiritual renewal.

Our various gatherings, such as the annual Islamic-Christian days organized at Notre Dame d'Afrique, the Augustinian days at the Basilica of Saint Augustine of Hippo, the Ribât Essalam meetings, the "School of Difference" meetings, the presence of Muslims at joint prayer events, and others, are a richness for everyone, because the gathered community rediscovers its primary vocation: to be an assembly of men and women who sense that Christ has already reached every human being and that we are invited to be supportive of one another, seeking, in true collaboration, to build a more humane society, more respectful of each person's path, and above all of the most vulnerable.

3. RECOGNIZING THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

"Your calling has called you to one hope." (Eph 4:4)

Some of us have emphasized the importance of recognizing the presence and action of the Lord's Spirit in the lives of Algerian Muslims and, in the manner of Jesus, marvelling at the living faith that resides in the hearts of so many men and women we encounter every day. It is there that fruitfulness becomes possible for everyone, through a compassionate look directed at the people around us. When we take an interest in culture, artistic research, and the ethical and social issues that arise around us, and when we feel genuine sympathy for what constitutes the life of Algerian society, the Spirit is present and at work.

In meetings with young artists—painters, photographers, writers—at the CCU or elsewhere, a shared meaning develops from what is felt, tasted, and experienced together. It is shared in a kind of generosity often close to a spiritual experience. In this generosity to which we are invited, we find inner roots: to pause, to rest again, to be present to what is offered, both in creating and in receiving the work. This active, even contemplative, practice of artistic expression belongs to the realm of the spiritual. The Spirit is there, at work.

He is present in all our efforts of reconciliation, to restore relationships, in a genuine movement of going beyond ourselves. Some have testified that meetings, even within our Christian community, are filled with conflicts, evaluations, and judgments. Many see the Church as a family from which they

expect a lot. Thus, they suffer deeply from the divisions that cross it, from the lack of tolerance and listening. They long for a 'Church where respect prevails without rivalry or pursuit of glory, supremacy, and power.'

The Second Vatican Council says of the Church that it is like a sacrament of salvation, that it is its sign and servant. If a Church community has the vocation to be a sign of the salvation offered to all, this means that it can experience it and bear witness to it. And the mark of salvation is expressed in the midst of our difficulties, conflicts, and violence. This involves a dialogue in truth, in a spirit of forgiveness, love chosen and maintained even in disagreement.

Through such experiences, some of us have been able to feel the active power of the Holy Spirit, which frees, heals hearts, and allows us to rejoice in our own gifts or charisms as well as those of others so that these gifts can be put at the service of the greatest number:

“On my journey of faith, I have also experienced wounds. When I wanted to become more deeply involved in a Christian community, I was faced with barriers that I did not understand (...). At the same time, a need was growing within me: the need for human connection, fraternal warmth, and authentic sharing. This lack led me to actively engage with Algerian Christian women. I wanted to offer them what I myself would have wanted to receive earlier: a listening ear, comforting words, a space where one can be genuine without fear of judgment. This commitment has become for me a path of healing and fruitfulness in faith.”

“All those who are called to follow Jesus, whatever their vocation, are called to bring Salvation to the world. What Charles de Foucauld introduced anew was making people understand that this Salvation can be brought about simply through solidarity with the men and women walking on earth toward the Kingdom, provided that it is lived in communion with Jesus who came to walk among us to save us. Those very same who are called to proclaim the Kingdom through words, pastoral activity, or service to the poorest also live in their own flesh this solidarity that brings salvation.”

4. BECOME A PRESENCE

"And the Lord will say: Here I am." (Is 58:9)

Life experienced as welcoming and attentive to the other and to what happens could express its challenge in this way: to become a presence, to embody Presence. What happens in Jesus allows us to grasp something of this. A woman is sick, Jesus is there, body and soul (Luke 4:38-44). He approaches, leans toward her, he is truly there, for her, with all of himself. He does nothing else but be there, yet with such presence, in such a dynamic with evil, that the body and mind of this woman are soothed.

In the evening, all the sick come to him, and he heals them, through the simplicity of his outstretched hand. Is this not a sign of his full presence offered to those who are there? Nothing more is said, but it is understood: Jesus was of such a presence, in the present of all these crowds, that it set people in motion or on their feet.

For some, our presence, by being attentive to the present moment, is one of the spiritual dimensions of our mission in this country:

"The vocation of our Church in Algeria is to stand in prayer, in Adoration, in Love, to stand in this free presence for Christ and for our brothers and sisters around us who do not know Jesus. (…) Brother Christophe of Tibhirine said about the Church: 'So I learn that there is first the Church, and we are this Christic body (…) And then there is something unique in our way of being Church: reacting to events, waiting for them, experiencing them; it is a certain awareness, as if we were responsible not for something to do, but for something to be here, in response to truth, in response to love.'"

Called to share in the spirit of our Lord, each of us, as a disciple, is continually invited to live in this presence, in order to be this presence among everyone. The language we use contains something of this experience. When we say of a person that they "have presence," we mean that they truly inhabit their place and meet others with authenticity, leaving an impression, transforming them in a certain way. Conversely, when we say of a person that they "are not present in their words and actions," we likely mean to express a difficulty in being.

At the same time, amid the healings recounted in the Gospels, Jesus withdraws to a deserted place, apart from others. He pays attention to the voice of his Father, and it is this voice that sets him in motion and makes him attentive to others. This voice seizes him, takes hold of him, and engages his whole life. He lets himself be guided by this voice, he fully gives his

presence, and he inspires in the disciples' new presences, authentic forms of Presence, as the sole praise of God made flesh. He manifests, throughout time, the presence of God and His Kingdom among us, as expressed in a testimony:

"Our blessed are a good example of what the Holy Father called in the apostolic exhortation GAUDETE ET EXULTATE (March 2018), the holiness of ordinary life. I really received this exhortation as if it had been written for us. Our nineteen blessed were ordinary people. Every day they gave their lives to God in prayer and in serving others. And they lived this in their everyday life, with, like all of us, ups and downs. Every day, they renewed their 'yes' to the gift of their life to God and to others, and thus affirmed that it was worth enduring and staying in Algeria. The relationship with our Algerian brothers and sisters, including in prayer, is the response to those who still question the meaning of our Church's presence in Algeria. The Church signifies God's love for His missionary people. It is the Church next door, according to the beautiful expression of that same exhortation. The saint, the Holy Father tells us, is the one who sees the holiness of his brother next door."

5. ENCOUNTER WITH GOD AND ENCOUNTER WITH OTHERS

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1:14)

Encountering God and encountering others are, in Christianity, inseparable. God loves us by giving us the ability to love Him alone and to love our brothers and sisters. He reveals Himself in the most concrete reality of our relationships with

people, through things, and also in the feelings that they inspire in us.

All our commitment in society, with others, is the place where we are called to be close to the Lord, for He is present and goes before us. If we seek Him in what we do and in those we meet, it is then that we experience something spiritual at the heart of our engagement in this world. It is a constant challenge for us, so that community and ecclesial life can focus on this relational experience.

In the stories, some expressed how they found ways to discover God at work at the heart of our missions, this God who precedes us in our Galilees. They also expressed that having a spiritual project for our communities and dioceses does not primarily mean organizing this or that event, but believing that the Spirit is at work in the world long before we arrive, and in people long before we take an interest in them, while emphasizing that the relationship with God is at the heart of Christian spirituality. This relationship and encounter with the Lord makes us happy and allows us to feel in our place, before Him and among our brothers.

At the same time, as many have said, there are people around us who are spiritual without being Christian, that is, people who are seeking to regain a kind of breath of humanity.

"There, in Algeria, I believe, we are all invited to open the doors every day to God's action in ourselves and in others. For what we experience in God meets what others experience in God. Beyond our differences, we arrive at the place where God's love in us meets God's love in others. This peaceful and beneficial openness

can be lived and expressed in the peace of the heart and in 'courtesy' (dear to Saint Francis), with each person taking care both to be themselves and to welcome the other as they are at their best."

"I am struck by the fact that Jesus essentially proclaimed the Kingdom to the crowds, that is, to all men and women, regardless of their religion or lack of religion. The charter of the Kingdom is the Beatitudes (...) The Mystery of Jesus is too 'incredible' for him to have wanted everyone to know him. What he wanted was for everyone to enter the Kingdom."

"I have sometimes spoken about the spirituality of a cup of coffee (...) We are moved by the spiritual depth of many human encounters. Do God, Christ, need to be named? As with the pilgrims of Emmaus, the Companion of the pilgrims of hope that we are, can walk alongside us for a long time, very long, with us, within us, without being recognized. And yet he is very much present."

"I am convinced that the sacrament of the Covenant is lived through us and the peoples who welcome us. We are a Church of the poor that must rise each day to tie on the apron. It is with each and every one that we can 'eucharist.' They are our hidden manna, in the process of resurrection. Thus, we are always pushed to better live brotherhood, as a sign of God's love given to the fullest. What I live is thanks to ALL THE OTHERS. The secret of God, isn't it LIFE IN THE PLURAL?"

6. JOURNEYING TOGETHER

"The kingdom of heaven is among us." (Luke 17:20)

Even before being announced and recognized, the Kingdom of God is made present everywhere, in all cultures, nations, and religions where the practice of the evangelical beatitudes is lived. It is present in action, in hospitality, in friendliness, and in all works of charity. It is the first fruit of the Kingdom of God. The role of witnesses comes immediately after, to recognize it, announce it, and add a word to the actions that reveals their meaning.

The testimonies echo the presence of this Kingdom in the hearts of Christian and Muslim believers, drawing on shared values, for common human causes, in a positive and respectful attitude. Because the desire for peace, mercy, harmony, and thirst for justice, like all the Beatitudes, transform our lives from within and lead to social, even political, transformation.

We recognize this Kingdom in Algeria, throughout history, in the lives of those who came before us and who helped build a more just, more fraternal, and more harmonious society. The example of the monks of Tibhirine and their devoted lives is significant.

“The nineteen blessed brothers and sisters are a beautiful icon of what the identity of our Church is. These two sayings of Blessed Christian de Chergé, prior of the monks of Tibhirine, seven of whom were murdered, still live in my heart and memory. He said: ‘God loved this people, Algeria, so much that He gave them His Son; God loved this people so much that He gave them His

Church.' In the Church, our blessed ones had given their lives to God and to Algeria, to the Algerian people. They continued to love and serve this people even while enduring the trials of the 'Black Decade,' the ten years of violence during the Algerian civil war, 1990-2000. They believed that their relationships with their brothers and sisters, with whom they had shared their entire lives, were more important than protecting their own lives. They were just as much in danger as the others but had made the choice to stay with them and support them. I believe that says something about what our Church is. It is with and for the people where it has been established since the second century."

This Kingdom, we recognize it today in the relationships of love that we discover around us, in the gratitude and acknowledgment of what we are given to experience here, which brings peace and joy. This is reflected in our attitudes and produces transformations that we were able to recognize during this jubilee year, and express in the 'thanksgiving,' celebrations, and diocesan days. These transformations are a reflection of the life of Jesus in the people of our communities who have expressed themselves. Their lives testify to the life we seek: eternal life, pointing us to Jesus of Nazareth. It is on this foundation that we perceive the presence of the Kingdom. It surpasses space and time and goes through 'trials,' as the Apocalypse says. And the difficulties of our ecclesial communities do not touch this peace and joy of life in Jesus. On the contrary, we are invited, following the calls present in the experiences of some of us, to enter more deeply into the prayer of the 'Our Father': forgive us our trespasses. For what else can destroy the 'us' if not offenses? It is therefore good that we ask

to have it cared for and healed by the Father: 'Forgive us our sins, our debts, as we have forgiven those of our debtors, so that we may restore this WE, divine, likeness to God, among us.' For this, we need the memory of the offenses suffered as much as the acknowledgment of the offenses committed against others, accompanied by the Father's forgiveness toward us. Some have experienced this and testify to it with great delicacy and even simplicity.

7. CONCLUSION: BEING UNCLUTTERED

In conclusion, a word about simplicity. For the taste and desire for a simple life—that is, a life free from many unnecessary things, a life that takes its time, without rushing, without chasing after all available goods—runs through all our life stories. The core of this weaving is exactly that: the simplicity of a person acting, here and now, rooted in a social and ecclesial body, in a presence sustained in faith by the benevolent breath of a caring and saving Presence.

Jesus invites us to join him in a lightened and restful life. A beautiful resonance with what the poet Christian Bobin wrote in his collection "Ressusciter".

"I have removed a lot of unnecessary things from my life, and God drew closer to see what was happening."

The Gospel opens a path to a simpler life, as the entire spiritual tradition testifies. The word of God reaches us, enlightens us, takes flesh within us. It simplifies us inwardly, guiding a lifestyle marked by hospitality and presence toward others.

This desire for a simple life is born at the heart of the world's complexity, but also in the shared heart of each of us. Through humble listening, free from any pretension of knowledge or control, and through the attention we pay to how personal and collective events touch us, affect us, open us to thanksgiving or prayer, make us tremble with joy or indignation, inspire compassion or tenderness, we become witnesses to the work of the Spirit.

Life thus tends toward its unity, in the welcoming of the present moment, where one allows oneself to be encountered, inhabited, and grasped by something greater than oneself. Meditation on the Word of God, prayer, reflection, and personal relationship with the Lord are invited here as a daily essential space for contemplation. It is there that we can reunify ourselves internally, in the movement of surrender to the Father, perhaps also to fight the discouragement that can sometimes seize us. Jesus would go aside at the end of days full of encounters and conversations, so that, afterwards, his relationship with others, in the simplicity of everyday life, could continue and increasingly respond each day to His desire: that all men may enter the Kingdom.

S. Gosia Jabłońska

The author

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Carriers of hope along the way…

Rereading these different stories transported me to very varied worlds. At times, I felt a deep closeness with the people. This leaves me with gratitude, humility, and prayer, for the present and the future of the Christian presence in this country.

In my view, all these sharing experiences are an invitation to be ever more open: to embrace ourselves in our own growth, to welcome others as they present themselves or express themselves, and to find God who reveals Himself beyond our frameworks and expectations. I am aware that I have not explored all aspects.

1. SOME SPIRITUAL PATHS

Through reading the sharing of others, I identify five spiritual paths that seem important for me to explore further. These are common threads that have guided, are guiding, and will continue to guide the path of our Church in Algerian land:

- - the path of 'being with': the joy of being with the people of the country;

- the fraternal community: fraternity woven and lived with the other members of the Church;

- the path of hospitality: learning to welcome and be welcomed by others;

- dialogue through collaboration in work or daily coexistence;

- the vocation of being the universal Church in Algeria.

1.1 ***The path of 'being with': the joy of being with the people of the country***

This reality is present in many stories. It is often the result of the choice to get close to the people along our paths. It also emerges from experiences of deep and lasting personal encounters. It seems to me that it is the joy that flows from the Gospel lived concretely and truthfully. This spiritual path of 'being with' could emerge from what Saint Ignatius of Loyola suggests: 'To find God in all things and all things in God.' Rooted in this conviction, all aspects of encountering others gain greater meaning. Thus, the simple acts of daily life take on the value of eternity. Is this not the path of Nazareth, where God himself becomes one of us in Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter and Mary?

Here are some very telling excerpts from texts:

"I loved Algeria, not only for its landscapes and its pleasant temperate climate, but above all, I loved the people, and they truly reciprocated that love…".

"Being in the middle of the city, for me it means listening to the sounds of the city, seeing its inhabitants and listening to them, feeling the markets. You see, I live between Mohamed V and Telemli, and I work near Audin Square. Walking through the streets, greeting people, whether known or less known…".

“What a joy to welcome a group of Chinese workers who were working on the Blida - Médéa highway, especially since this group had a competent translator, what a joy to welcome a group of pilgrims on their way to Tamanrasset, what a joy to welcome an

Algerian agency that came to discover this prominent site of spiritual tourism, … what a joy to open the door to a group of potters paired with an Algerian group from Djelfa… a friendly family from Algiers who came to relax over the weekend in the fresh air of Tibhirine, what a joy to celebrate the Eucharist with a group of young French scouts on a traveling camp in Algeria, following in the footsteps of the brothers, of Charles de Foucauld, of St. Augustine… what a joy to give a historical presentation on the Trappist presence in the Titteri for Algerian university students majoring in history, what a joy it is to open the door to the monastery's neighbours who come simply to greet us and show their closeness, what a joy to share a piece of 'tammina' cake on the occasion of a birth in the village, what a joy, at each Muslim holiday, to greet neighbours by wishing each other 'happy holiday'..."

"Jean-Pierre HIRON, a permanent deacon, alone in the mountains of Kabylie, was a beautiful presence at the heart of a community he served as a public writer, and in the same region, the presence of a white sister in Larbaâ Nath Irathen; the sisters of Ténès, 200 km from the capital. Church presences that one might see as insignificant, and yet they say everything about the Gospel, yeast in a dough…"

1.2 ***The fraternal community: fraternity woven and experienced with the other members of the Church***

The small Church of Algeria is a part of the Church founded on Christ. As with the small community at the beginning, it is the place where the personal vocation of each Christian grows and is strengthened. Each of our small ecclesial communities

becomes an ecosystem that nurtures life. In this ecosystem, the fraternity among members of the Church is a fundamental foundation in the strength of interpersonal relationships. It is also a source of mutual strength and support. It takes root in prayer, in communal or united celebrations, in shared quality moments, and sometimes in difficult events experienced together. This fraternal communion becomes both the cement that strengthens the community from within and a pleasant fruit, accessible to all from the outside. All sharing converges towards this affirmation of fraternal communion as a constitutive element of the Church, part of God's plan, and as a guarantee of a true evangelical witness. Here are some expressions of this:

"Every community of Christian sisters and brothers is a home of Light where the presence of Christ shines and glows for the people of the household and for those nearby. This is a precious gift for everyone."

"Experiencing communion and family with the bishops. The Church in the manger is not the title of a book; it is the reality of our Church."

"The common prayer among the Spiritans and FMM sisters, then the Salesians: morning and evening prayers, with an integrated Mass in the evening or morning, marks our union in prayer, the source of our shared mission. I will personally discover the importance of regularity in these times of common prayer. Not only the regularity but also these moments of sharing and mutual support."

"What I am grateful for and give thanks to is the presence of the Vincentian Family, as a place of sharing, renewal, and support."

“The most important thing I can mention is having had a family I can rely on, in Algeria, in the Church of Algeria, particularly in Boumerdes. Today, I am one of the elders. I call them all my little brothers and sisters. They call me big brother. It's truly a family I’ve been able to have here.”

“Belonging to the East/Kabylie deanery, where we regularly met to share what we were experiencing, initiate, and reflect on the mission and the priorities to keep in mind towards Algerians, towards the students. Getting to know the White Fathers in their history and mission. I hold these meetings close to my heart, even though, at the beginning, some were turbulent, very lively; they were always an opportunity to come together again under the Lord’s eyes and before the mission He entrusted to us. Truly times of fraternity.”

"And it is together, with others, brothers and sisters, that I am on the journey. And everyone brings their own, who they are, what they do, what they have. It is collaboration and together, as a family, we continue on the path. And in this way, we build a world, a home, where everyone feels at home. This is the Church we are building."

"I thank the Lord with all my heart for the community of Constantine; the closeness we have with the members helps us grow spiritually. God knows each one with their character, but He brings us together in prayer. It is a family, a true family."

"I have attended sessions to delve deeper into the Gospels with great interest. Gradually, I became attached to what was, in fact, my parish. There I found what I was looking for, a return to my spiritual life that had long been neglected for family reasons. I relearned how to pray. We also received, quite simply, the Apostolic Nuncio of Algiers in 2023. We were able to pray together for Peace. Old memories come back to me: the Christmas sharing, festive gatherings of all the members of the Hippo and the Plain communities; extensive collective preparation, cakes, drinks, and of course, songs blending together in joy."

"Moreover, the discovery of a wonderful community, unfortunately small, but very friendly. I got to know the priest and the parishioners. Well integrated, I began to participate in the community during Masses, experiencing liturgical moments in full communion with the students (festivities), and Sunday Mass with the 'community of the plain.' The key moments of gathering at Christmas, Easter, during Lent, etc., allowed me to regain a certain serenity and joy. This is what the chapel made me discover and experience…"

"I think that the Church is the body of Christ, and when we live together, that is to say, I have to give a little of myself to make room for the other."

Finally, the youngest also express the beneficial role of the church community in their human and faith journey: "What I also love is that our faith is nourished in the collective. We pray together, we sing, we experience powerful and spiritual moments, sometimes very simple, but very profound. These are

often the moments that we, the young people, remember the most."

In conclusion of this point on community, we can note that no one is ever a Christian alone. Through baptism, we belong to God and to one another. We form the body of Christ, which is built in diversity.

1.3 ***The Path of Hospitality: Learning to Welcome and Be Welcomed by Others***

"Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God, you who were Gentiles." (Romans 15:7)

The attitude of mutual welcome is a sign of our faith in Christ, who Himself first welcomed us "for the glory of God." It is therefore not a consensual speech of humanitarian inspiration, where welcoming the other comes from a desire to accept difference or to exalt the richness of diversity. As Christians, we are recipients of grace, and to glorify God, who is its source, we are urged to welcome one another. This is even more true in our context. Hospitality is the cement of our presence in Algeria. It means opening the doors of our homes, our centres, and above all the doors of our hearts to receive the other and to receive from them. On the other hand, allowing oneself to be welcomed is also a requirement. Hospitality is a whole process of conversion, transformation, and continuous searching for how to move from me to us, from them to us. Two white sisters who lived together in Kef, Tunisia, used to say this: 'The bread of hospitality is never baked in advance. It is made together, between those who arrive and those who welcome them.'

This expression speaks to us of a dynamic process that involves everyone's engagement. The result is unpredictable and will reflect what each person has contributed. This is where the symbolism of the door offering passage becomes very meaningful. The authors' testimony in this regard is eloquent:

"I actively participate in the building of the Church of Algeria through my presence, my prayer, through small activities within this Church itself, and by welcoming visitors to the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa."

"Being warmly welcomed, working without disturbance, earning the respect and trust of my colleagues, doctors, patients, and even children has been a beautiful and powerful experience."

"… the tradition of hospitality: gestures, words, meals, the fellowship of hospitality."

"In Beni Abbès, we welcome visitors from Algeria and abroad… Muslims, pilgrims, agnostics, because the hermitage is one of the places visited by travel agencies…"

"In the Church, I participate in welcoming those who knock at the door."

"… I feel welcomed as a brother."

"Because I told myself that what often causes us problems is the lack of dialogue and also ignorance. That's it. If we take the time to get to know each other, to listen to each other, to have a dialogue, we will see that we have a lot in common and that there are many things we can share. And so, every other Sunday, on the Friday for which we have our celebrations, we have Mass, the

Eucharist, and the following Friday, we have worship, evangelical worship, in which we all participate."

Hospitality for us, a small Church in Algeria, is a personal and community apostolic priority. It is also a spiritual value that we share with our Muslim friends and our brothers and sisters from other religious traditions. This path leads us to the discovery of the other, of ourselves, and of God. It is a true journey toward spiritual and human conversion during which we learn humility, truth, and letting go.

1.4 ***Experiencing dialogue through collaboration at work or in daily cohabitation***

Even though today the issue of Islamic-Christian dialogue is topical in almost all parts of our world, the Algerian experience seems unique to me. Most writings highlight human encounters and common commitment to the good as a prerequisite for a journey on a religious level. In other words, we are friends, neighbours, colleagues before we are Christians and Muslims.

"Most good Father, we bless You for the Holy Spirit who is at work in the hearts, words, and actions of our Muslim brothers and sisters in Tébessa. In their own way, they work for Your Kingdom by seeking paths of Peace. In their own way, they patiently form the body of Christ by seeking truth and justice."

"I have understood that the vocation of this Church in Algeria is to live in fraternity with the Algerian people. In the women's groups that I attend every day, I have the responsibility to foster 'living together.' We work together in respect, despite our differences."

Another witness describes his own path of conversion in these terms:

"I have learned, in Church and alongside my Christian companions, to see all of us, individuals and peoples, as a diverse, complex, and complementary humanity in the Heart and Plan of the Father, and to feel ourselves linked, as this Algerian people, to all of humanity and to all of Creation. Moving away from the way of placing everyone in a rigid, exclusive category and constantly making hierarchies and comparisons, I felt empathy and kindness take over, teaching us to truly walk and to build together with the Algerian Muslims."

Young people express this desire for dialogue as a request: 'Trust us. Give us a space.' and 'We need to feel that we are part of this Church, not just as spectators but as builders.' Comment: 'Let them experiment, create, and propose, accompany them. But believe in their ability to bear fruit.'

Dialogue is possible within a relationship of trust. It is a choice to make and remake every day.

1.5 ***The vocation of being the universal Church in Algeria***

Our Church in Algeria is nourished by the Universal Church through the diversity of its members, who come from various backgrounds, its participation in the structures of the mother Church, and in the significant events of its life. In turn, it enriches the larger family of the Universal Church by contributing its specific richness as a Church that is fragile, discreet, and a minority in a Muslim context. Our 19 blessed martyrs and the saints who have lived there are a gift to the

Universal Church. One of our bishops used to say, "Whatever time you spend in Algeria, the Church is yours." As a result, the Church in Algeria shares in the universality of the Church through the wealth of experience of those who attend it for a longer or shorter period. Another aspect of this universality is expressed in pilgrimages. It is also expressed in the mutual sharing among its members.

"One thing that helped me spiritually: in 2000, Bishop Teissier sent me to Rome for the Jubilee. For me, it was a great experience and a great joy, a grace to have met the Pope."

Another witness clearly describes how he became more open-minded through meeting others in these terms:

“What I appreciated most in this role was getting to know the other dioceses in Algeria and the Maghreb, which was facilitated by the CERNA meetings. Those held in Rome (due to the impossibility of gathering CERNA in Libya or Algeria, or for the ad limina visit) broadened my perspective even further.”

Other testimonies also left an impression on me:

“The Christian community is made up of an average of about ten students; often, the majority are from various Protestant denominations. This is a new ecumenical experience for me, to the point that some years we celebrate Mass very rarely, and instead opt for a good time of prayer after a Bible study. There are also a few Algerian Christians, but they can hardly visibly join the Christian community.”

“Being the secretary of the Regional Episcopal Conference of North Africa means participating in the network of the eight

regions of the Catholic Church in Africa coordinated by SECAM, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar; it is an opportunity for me to discover the continent and its Church a little, with meetings in Abidjan, Accra, Addis Ababa, or Nairobi."

"Today I live my life as a baptized person, as an oblate in the ordinary daily life of my life while being connected to my family, to our diocese of Constantine, to our parish of Saint Monica, through prayer and the small services I can perform. The prayer of the present moment is important, and I try to stick to it: Lauds, Vespers, and also participating in the Eucharist, which is the greatest prayer of the Church. This time of prayer puts me in communion with the Church: it is the prayer of the Church. The prayer of the present moment, the office, is the sanctification of the hours, thus of time. This sanctification of the hours puts me in communion with my other brothers and sisters of our Church here in Algeria and beyond the borders with my sisters from Pradines."

"Before, there wasn't time to interact, but the relationships were friendly and fraternal; however, there was the community of locals and the community of Europeans along with the student community. After 2000, the barrier was broken. The communities became one single community. This was also thanks to the arrival of the White Fathers from the continent. I think this allows us to break down everything we think about the other and vice versa. Before, the relationship had barriers; now we are truly brothers."

2. SOME CHALLENGES

Some people express challenges related to experiences they have already had or connected to their expectations. Here, I

take up five points, the exploration of which will help us move forward on the post-jubilee stage that lies ahead.

2.1 ***Remaining in Gratitude***

"I bless you, Lord of heaven and earth." (Mt 11:15)

Despite the upheavals of history and everyday events, a fundamental invitation addressed to the followers of Christ, in my view, is the attitude of gratitude. Indeed, situations of injustice, powerlessness, and the feeling of oppression can easily take over if we are not attentive to the signs of the Kingdom, often barely noticeable, and if we do not maintain a constant attitude of giving thanks. The temptation to criticize, which can seize us when listening to our Algerian brothers and sisters, the temptation to compare Algerian situations with our own experiences, do not help us remain in thankfulness. Similarly, over time, we can be overwhelmed by the weariness of certain struggles, always the same, on which nothing seems to progress: this exposes us to a sense of discouragement that undermines our ability to give thanks.

"We express our deep gratitude to Him for the beautiful Catholic community of Béjaïa, where fraternity and love for others leave no room for doubt. This family of faith, united in Christ Jesus, walks under His benevolent yoke, He who is the Master of time and space. By His holy will, this assembly, rich in its cultural diversity, progresses in radiant harmony, and its spiritual influence extends beyond the visible boundaries."

2.2 ***The Financial Challenge***

Our Church in Algeria relies heavily on financial aid from abroad for our daily subsistence, the maintenance of our buildings, and our apostolic activities. Our activities do not generate substantial income. Some of our elders receive an Algerian retirement pension. However, with their passing, this source quickly dries up. Only the Little Sisters of the Poor have an initiative relying on the charity of Algerians. Contributions in the form of registration fees, membership dues, and donations from our beneficiaries in other activities organized by our communities do not cover expenses. How can we face the challenge of not having the means to support ourselves financially? How can a "lifeline-dependent" community survive and sustain its charitable activity? How can it continue to serve the most vulnerable in society without risking becoming an NGO (concerned with transparency, professionalization, and traceability of transactions, and responding to the needs of people in precarious situations)?

This aspect is practically absent in the discussions, but I find it important for today, which is why I want to highlight it as a challenge.

2.3 ***Communion in Diversity***

In recent years, members of the Christian community have become very diverse in their backgrounds. This is certainly a blessing, but in daily life, it creates a problem of communion arising from the tension between personalities, cultures, and experiences. Do our national identities take precedence over our belonging to Christ and our desire to be Church together?

Are there members who are more Christian than others? How can we be the Church of Algeria, a part of the universal Church, while maintaining a specifically Algerian character?

“Over the years, we have made friends in our parish, a true ‘chain of faith’; Christians, both men and women, in a Muslim country, sharing the same values (tolerance, friendship, sharing) and walking the path of the Church of Algeria.”

The concern is based on a need for healing, reconciliation, and rebuilding lost trust. Distrust is maintained in the subconscious by the consequences of turbulent relations with France and the unhealed traumas of the black decade. In some exchanges, this challenge of communion versus mistrust becomes apparent.

"The healing work could not go as far as allowing young people in training to speak up to explain and understand what the people had gone through. By naming the 'black decade' the 'national tragedy,' the authorities suggest that it is a play performed by actors unknown to everyone, and without families."

I would also like to highlight two differences that pose challenges for communion. The first, which I will awkwardly call between 'old' and 'new.' I notice a clear difference in approach to our Church between those who have been in this country since the beginning of the millennium and those who have arrived more recently (about five years ago). Indeed, for those who came at the beginning of the millennium, there is a reference to the years of terrorism and the transition to the Church that we are today. For the newly arrived, the focus is more on the service provided to the Christian community and

the not always formal encounters with Algerians through that service. The second difference concerns people of Algerian nationality. They are shaped by two experiences and a desire: experiences of rejection that lead them on a path of search, the fundamental experience of baptism, and the desire for a 'new welcoming, warm, affectionate family' in the Church. Meanwhile, people of other nationalities are more focused on intercultural and interreligious interactions, specifically their relationship with brothers and sisters of Islam.

2.4 ***The future***

Reflecting on this point, I find myself faced with the question: "What is the Lord calling us to today as a Church?" The number of foreign permanents is decreasing. The locals struggle to assert their presence, caught between external persecution and a difficult adjustment. What future lies ahead in the face of the reduction of permanent staff and the non-recognition of Algerian Christians? I seem to perceive a great deal of frustration among Algerian Christians towards the Church. This testimony seems to convey it quite well:

"*Over the years, another painful reality has imposed itself on me as a serious obstacle to the growth and maturity of the Church in Algeria, particularly here in Constantine. I have sadly observed that some priests and sisters who came from abroad – despite their sincere zeal, evident compassion, and deep desire to serve – have sometimes struggled to fully understand the spiritual and human needs of Algerian believers. Their commitment often turned outward: toward interreligious dialogue, openness to Islam, and the warm welcome received from many Muslims. This*

hospitality – very real and commendable – sometimes seemed to captivate them to the point of diverting their attention from the small local Christian community, which remained fragile, isolated, and thirsty for encouragement."

Other testimonies seem interesting to me on this point:

"This missionary momentum of the Church in Algeria is not easy to express, because the Algerian state suspects us of proselytism and demonstrates this by issuing visas to Church staff in a trickle."

"Currently, the challenge of building a local Church rooted in Algerian culture is being shaped less by abstract reflection than by the life of the communities, notably through the liturgy and especially through songs borrowed from various languages and with very diverse rhythms and melodies."

"It happens that some of our foreign perspectives unconsciously (blindly?) place themselves above Algerian reality. The comparisons of 'US – THEM' result in caricatures lacking the basic empathy that a Christian should have. It happens that colleagues who have arrived in the last decade seem indifferent to the meaning and depth of our encounters."

"All I personally wish is to one day have a Church that is not considered a cultural association. The time when I was somewhat discovering the Church was during the time of Bishop Teissier. He emphasized the importance of a Christian presence, but a discreet one."

2.5 ***Transitions***

A constant element in sharing is the willingness to undergo personal transformations, passages, transitions… Isn't this essentially the spirit of pilgrimage? These are in fact processes that have begun which, like a river, shape the path according to time and space. Ultimately, this element reveals the Church on the move throughout the ages. Here is a rather eloquent excerpt of text that nicely illustrates these ongoing transitions:

Another major development is the profile of the Church's 'missionaries' or permanent staff. Mostly European (mainly from France and Spain), they now come from all continents, with a majority of newcomers of African origin. The average age has also decreased, and the age pyramid has become more balanced. French remains the language of the Church, but English is the second language, ahead of Arabic and Tamazight. The initial year at Glycines, established a few years ago, encourages training in the Arabic language and more Arabized liturgies.

The challenge at this level is that of the social and apostolic integration of these new permanents. But the Lord gives us the answer: *'John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow us." "Do not stop him," Jesus replied, "for no one who performs a miracle in my name can in the next moment speak ill of me"*" (Mk 9:38-39).

3. CONCLUSION

I choose to stop here. At the end of this reading and reflection, the relationship between Christians and Muslims in

this country remains for me a profound mystery. It seems to me that every disciple of Christ in this country must find meaning in their presence here and now, while also committing to a path of knowledge and understanding of Algerian society. This seems important to me at all times. It is now a matter of finding the values on which to base this search for meaning. Finally, as a community of disciples, are we worshippers who coexist and reach out to other worshippers with the aim of building the Kingdom, which is justice, peace, and living together?

S. Valérie Kaboré

Conclusion

This collection of texts was intended to allow you to enter into the experience of the Catholic Church in Algeria through three doors: historical for the first, theological for the second, and spiritual for the last, with two different perspectives on this aspect.

We hope that your reading has allowed you to make this entry, whether you have never heard of our Church or already know it a little. If you reside in Algeria, we hope that your reading has shed light on one aspect or another of your life. Perhaps you recognized yourself in certain attitudes you have experienced or observed in others. For everyone, we hope that this testimony of the Church has been able to nourish your spiritual life and invite you to continue your spiritual pilgrimage in this world.

At the end of your reading, you may have remarks to make or questions to ask. Do not hesitate to contact us through the Church's website.

The Interdiocesan Team for the 2025 Jubilee

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