

# THE SEED OF THE CHARISMA

## Interculturality and charisma

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Reflecting on the communication that I was requested to prepare on “interculturality and charisma,” I had some doubts. The dominant theme of this meeting is interculturality, but when one turns to the charisma of the Institute one prefers to emphasize its “enculturation.” Certainly there are some connections between the two issues, but there are also some differences.

Interculturality considers primarily the relationship and the coexistence between different cultures, and it rather emphasizes the urgency of respect, esteem, which can achieve to become reception, interchange and appreciation of different cultural expressions, to be implemented in life’s behaviors. A diversity which is to be respected, though not incorporated, as it happens in the acculturation process. It can also coexist with prejudice, be limited to formal, respectful relationships, but which do not affect the cultural identity of the subjects.

Enculturation, on the contrary, is more dedicated to the mutual integration between the various aspects of Christian life (including the consecrated life) and cultures:

*Intimate transformation of the authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the establishment of Christianity in the various human cultures* (Synod of Bishops of 1985);

*The incarnation of the Gospel in the native cultures and also their introduction into the life of the Church* (Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, 21). In general terms: the message of Christ permeates a given socio-cultural context, it makes it grow in its own values, provided they are compatible with the gospel and also the cultures enrich the Gospel and the Church with a plurality of expressions.

In this process, the theological paradigm of reference is the mystery of the Incarnation, where there is something immutable: the divinity (“*id quod erat permansit*”) and something taken up: the humanity (“*quod non erat assumpsit*”). So in all forms of enculturation: it is not the substance of the gospel that is enculturated, but its expression and practical implementation in life. The same goes for all aspects of Christian life, including religious life.

### “Enculturation” of the charisma

In presenting this argument, the program of this Conference rightly notes that it is necessary to clarify what it means to enculturate the charisma. And I think that this should take place according to what has just been stated. Even in the charisma you can locate the core of the original inspiration that should not be changed because its origin is from God and its eventual change would mean abandoning the identity of the charisma of the foundation. Other values, however, can be adapted in line with the different cultural contexts and with the evolution of the times and situations.

The charisma, transmitted by the Founders, has developed in them according to their spirituality, their character, the social and religious situations in which they have lived and which must be taken into account. But through these components it is the gift of the Spirit: experience of the Spirit transmitted to their own disciples so as to be lived by them, preserved, deepened and constantly developed in line with the body of Christ continually growing (MR 11).

Founders are the people whom the Spirit uses in a given moment in history to implement the plan of salvation, facing emergencies or failures to which attention must be paid. The charisma transmitted to their disciples is not an impulse born out of “the flesh and the blood”... it is the fruit of the Spirit who always acts in the Church

This applies in particular to the way of life destined to the Mission ad gentes, of which the Spirit is the principal agent, the architect, the Protagonist and Moving Force. He is the one who inspires and brings about the missionary institutions and enkindles in them the missionary yearning (DeV 21; AG 4; EN, RM).

For this reason, the fundamental original charismatic inspiration transmitted by the Founder has a permanent value. themselves, with which we must confront ourselves, that ought to change; the enculturation of religious life is addressed to them, but it must take place according to the charisma of their Institute (VC 80).

Our Blessed Father Founder, at a time when it was not common to use the word “charisma” and even less the word “enculturation,” was nevertheless deeply convinced of them and stated it several times, preferably using the word “spirit”: it is the spirit that shapes and gives life to the individual institutions... and individuals are living members of the Institute to which they belong, in as much as they have its spirit (VS 88). The form that you must take up in the Institute is the one that the Lord has inspired me and continues to inspire me (VS 86). He does not tire repeating: I am the one to give you the spirit, you have to take the spirit from me because The Lord gives me the spirit to give to you. Yes, I have received it from the Lord.<sup>3</sup> So doing, the Institute will retain its true identity.

It is also confirmed by his frequent repetition of having wanted and of wanting missionaries who are “*different*”, sisters who are “*different*” from the others. This “diversity” depends on the inspirations of the spirit which confer a “*style*” of life and action, generating a *peculiar physiognomy*, that of the “Consolata Missionaries” which gives them their own way of being in the Church, namely, a peculiar way to live the vows, organize their spiritual life, bring about peaceful coexistence, be involved in their activities.

The generic use of the word “spirit” used by the Founder may make it difficult to identify what in this “physiognomy” can be adapted or enculturated, and what is essential to the charisma. It is therefore necessary to assess what can be considered for an enculturation that is deemed necessary and that is also required by our Constitution, which states: “Different social and cultural situations require that the Institute be open to renewal, enculturation and pluralism” (Constitution 6).

In order to try to clarify where the adjustment to the “new socio-cultural and ecclesial contexts where the Institute is present” (XICG, 18.2) ought to take place, I wish to distinguish four areas:

In this respect I distinguish four sectors.

a) The original nucleus, the “hard core” of the charisma is clearly indicated by our Constitution: The purpose that characterizes us in the Church is the evangelization of the peoples who are not yet evangelized, with preference for those most needy and neglected (Constitution 5, 17). Allamano is quite firm on this: We are for the infidels, in order to proclaim the gospel to those who have not yet received it or who may have strayed away from it. And he added significantly, We firmly stick to this goal We also know that he considered this cooperation with God for the accomplishment of his universal plan of salvation as the “most sublime” work, “the most divine work among all other divine works.” That this is the basis, the essential reference to all, it is made evident by our Constitution when it adds, This goal must permeate our spirituality, guide our choices, qualify our formation and our apostolic activities, totally guiding our whole existence (No. 5). Unifying denominator of the whole formation and of all the aspects of life is the mission; we should have it in the head, on the mouth, in the heart. We should have it as a vow to serve the missions even at the cost of life (VS 461). It is something that pervades everything, characterizes and qualifies the study, our interests, readings, celebrations and our spiritual life. It should also qualify all our pastoral services. This is not foreign to the way of the Founder. His formation “method” always kept in mind the connection of each topic he was handling with the specific Mission of the Institute.

It has been pointed out these past few days the importance of the Mission for the interculturality. Yesterday Fr. Ugo has stressed the need to investigate further the how and where of the mission “ad gentes.” And this must continued to be done, holding firm on the compliance of our choices with

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<sup>3</sup> Conf. I, 273

this essential core of the charisma.

b) This fundamental charismatic objective should be lived with spiritual and practical dimensions, essential and indispensable, because they are part of the “modality” intended by the Founder in order to implement it, and make the Institute:

A family of consecrated people for the mission “ad gentes” in the profession of the evangelical counsels, having Mary as model and Mother (Constitution 4).

c) These basic points of the charisma must be experienced with special reference to other attitudes, which also cannot be sidestepped. We prefer to indicate them as “characteristics”, because they help give to the Consolata Missionary a characteristic feature ordered by the Founder (Constitution 10). For this reason they can be considered an integral part or at least inseparable from his charisma and spirit. It is the privileged attention to Mary, the Church, the Eucharist, the liturgy, and the industriousness (Nos. 11-16).

For Allamano you cannot disconnect the primary missionary commitment from the features mentioned. And we find them as conditions which for the Founder were essential components for the beginning of the Institute and therefore they are part of the original inspiration.

We cannot think of a Consolata Missionary Institute that is not committed to achieve:

The “family spirit” and not acting in the “unity of intents.” Allamano has established the Institute in order to give to those involved in the mission a *family* where to find help, support and assistance: A young man who leaves everything, his family, must find something similar to another family. This for him is the soul and the life of our family.<sup>7</sup> This has always been my idea, he would say. And on another painful occasion, he said that if he had not seen participation as children of a family he would have said this is not the house that I had conceived, that the Lord had inspired to me (Conf. II, 833).

It is also part of the original intention or inspiration the project to gather a group of people dedicated solely to the missions to which they could attend, being *all united* in a given place, depending on their own Superiors, and thus having that mutual encouragement and help which is missing to people scattered in different places and under foreign Superiors. He repeats this to the young people in formation: to live together, prepare yourselves together and then work together for your whole life (VS 405).

To the same objectives should be referred the initial idea of a “regional” Institute: in order to increase among the Missionaries that spirit of union, and that mutual encouragement which, in distant regions, more easily occur among those coming from the same fatherland [i.e.: country or region].

This is also one of the reasons for the closing of the Institute, recently formed, with the delivery of the “keys” to the Consolata.

- It would not belong to Allamano an Institute that would not bear the name of the Consolata, not for “devotional” reasons but for his absolute belief that the Founder is not him (so much so that never in his life he was given this title) but that the *Founder* and Mother is the Consolata.

- The “ecclesial” characteristic is not limited to an obedient allegiance to the ecclesial authority, particularly to the Pope, but it is also part of the initial inspiration. He begins by noting that his diocese, rich in cultural, pastoral, educational and charitable institutions, lacked a real opening to the mission “ad extra”, or it was poorly implemented.<sup>11</sup> He saw the need to be aware that every Church, every priest has a “broader mission”, which goes beyond their own needs and territorial boundaries. I consider significant his statement: If you love the Church you will also be mindful of the Missions. The Decree on his virtue agrees with him, saying that through his work the Diocese became vibrant with missionary spirit (No. 38).

– Similar references and reflections can be made for the Eucharist, the liturgy, the industriousness, convinced that our life is valuable if it is active for us and for the others (VS 480).

<sup>7</sup> Reg. 1891, III, 17°; Constitution 15

<sup>11</sup> Letters of April 5, 1891; April 6, 1900

Industriousness, connected by the Father Founder himself to human promotion, together with evangelization is regarded by him as the guiding principle of all his work for the missions.

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d) Together with these points considered as most characteristic of our charisma, we cannot forget other emphases, which strictly speaking cannot be viewed as part of the charisma, but that, for the Founder, have a considerable weight in the physiognomy of the Consolata Missionary. First the burning zeal for the salvation of souls which for him is the badge of the true missionary,<sup>13</sup> but which also stimulates the ability of enculturation: The inner fire, the burning desire that the Lord be glorified, makes us capable of grasping the needs of the present moment, and these are a stimulus to action, to open up new ways. You may also remember: the “quality”, constancy, resourcefulness, energy, style of evangelization (cf. Const. 19, 71-76).

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### **Scope of enculturation**

I see it especially in these essential “notes” of the Institute, with a privileged attention to the fundamental characteristics with which the Institute was born.

Postponing further the consideration of the fundamental criteria to be followed in carrying out this process of enculturation, I wish to emphasize now that it should pay attention to the following three fundamental aspects:

- Obviously, to the cultures in order to capture those aspects that can enhance the commitment to assimilate and make one’s own the characteristics above mentioned;

- The highlight of their missionary dimension; this is also done by the documents of the Council and also by other documents of the recent Magisterium as: the reference to Mary that brings to the world the true Consolation Christ; the Eucharist the *source and summit of all Christian life and of the Mission* The liturgy: *significant place of missionary education of the Christian community* "(CVMC 48), the Church communion, essentially missionary and universal; the Mission as proclamation of the gospel and human development;

- The development of theology, the conception of the liturgy and spirituality, especially after the Second Vatican Council. I believe that the very theme of inter-culture should be directed to this too, while often we stop at issues of a Tridentine theological culture, which is devotional, partial, especially with regard to the Eucharist and Mariology. Perhaps we take refuge in a legacy of customs and concepts of the past.

For example, the Allamano strongly desired and recommended and proposed as characteristic of the Institute the celebration of the Liturgy. He wanted it to be nice, decent, worthy of God and respectful of his people who participated in it. Is it so with us? Furthermore, do we bear in mind the presentation of the **Liturgy** made by the Council, as the source, the summit, “pulsating heart”, starting point and ending point of the whole action of the Church? It should be considered as a whole: ritual, content, participation, internalization, formation, deepening of the mystery of Christ, of the nature of the Church, of its missionary dimension.

In the program of John Paul II for the beginning of this new millennium there is the hope and the proposal for a “renewed missionary zeal” (NMI 58), connected to the “maximum commitment” to qualify the liturgy and draw from the **Eucharist** a “mission plan” and to form a double “indissoluble binomial” between the Eucharist and the Church, Eucharist and Mission.

### **Possible implementations**

Without presumptions of a masterful character, we can try some modest suggestions, which can be further extended to the individual features already mentioned. Remaining on the general, only two starting points:

1) “**Family spirit**” and “**unity of intents**” in the community collaboration of the activities. Perhaps it is not easy to know to what style of family we should refer to. But we also speak much about “Church family” for Africa, and elsewhere about a sense of acceptance, communion, hospitality, respect for the other, for the elderly, sense of belonging. These and other aspects could

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<sup>13</sup> Reg. 1891 and Constitution 18

be studied in depth in order to adopt a lifestyle and community action, that will translate in the various cultures what the Founder had thought and wanted as a lifestyle and action of the Institute. I emphasize:

a) The formation and growth in the sense of identification with the Institute, also this thought out and wanted by Allamano from the outset: To love one's own colleagues as true brothers and sisters... to take at heart the interests of the Society and consider its good successes as one's own individual good. Making one's own the joys, sufferings and hopes of the Institute in any place where it operates (Const. 15). The first missionaries used to say that this is "our badge", "our mold."

So many times he reiterated that we all must feel involved in what happens in any part where the Institute operates: all in Kenya, all in Kaffa, all in Tanzania and so on. [Information]

b) To ban indifference: I would have said this is not what the Lord has inspired me, "it is not my responsibility." Indifference leads to non-cooperation and non-involvement with the others regarding their work, their health and spiritual growth.

c) Acceptance, about which the behavior has been impressive, as to make one say "we have not had again a father like him."

d) Knowledge of history (Const. 3: Let us look with interest...

2) **Prayer.** It is a fundamental element also for the Mission (cf. "memories" of Allamano to those about to leave), RM; contemplative in action. You can find good links with local religious expressions or pious exercises. We have a tradition, codified in the "*Directory of prayer.*" It would be convenient to carefully analyze and consider what possibilities there are for adaptation in order to give to the style and forms of prayer a greater incidence through references to the local traditions. Expressions of Marian piety, the mystery of the Eucharist (not limited to the real presence), the liturgy in all its aspects, should all together be carefully considered.

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### **Some basic criteria**

For the study of possible enculturations, some basic criteria, which I think have already been mentioned, ought to be remembered.

#### **a. Theoretical and experiential knowledge:**

- of the *Founder*; of the Institute and its history, which includes a strong sense of belonging to his missionary family as its own inalienable good (Reg. 1891); only love for the Founder and for the Institute makes it clear where to take action without reneging his spirit; this is to be combined with an experience of the charisma and spirit of the Institute; knowledge does not suffice for the work of enculturation;

– of the *cultures*; even this knowledge cannot be limited to the study, though necessary, but it should extend to the experience of life through contact with people, dialoguing with the elders, the oral traditions and writings. Only in this way you have access to the deep roots of the culture of a people. This is also taught by the Founder himself who, in his instructions to the first Missionaries, proposes a method, deemed quite original even by others, that includes the systematic and planned visit to the villages, the contact with people. He recommends to them: , observe and take notice of places, sayings, customs, ideas, "principles of natural morality", in order to eventually present Christianity in a way that is accessible to their mentality, grafting it on their positive qualities. That is the reason why he insists on the keeping of a daily "Diary", not only for recording their daily activities, but also their notes relating the geographical environment, climate, local customs, their own reactions and those of the people, their hospitality, the questions made by them. It is the same recommendation that sixty years later Vatican II will make to the missionaries: know history in depth, social structures and customs of the various peoples, let them penetrate their moral organization, their religious norms and their deeper ideas that, according to their traditions, they already have about God, the world and man. Let them learn the languages so well that they may use them in a fluent and proper way: this will be the method to get more easily to the minds and hearts of the people (AG 26).

If you want to do the work of enculturation, this is essential in order to grasp the soul, the mind,

the “genius” of a people. In fact, it should happen, as for the Word made flesh. , to some extent, with the forms of life of those to whom we want to bring the message of Christ, we must share, without putting distances of privileges or diaphragm of an incomprehensible language, the common customs, provided they are human and honest, especially those of the least ones, if we want to be heard and understood. It is necessary, even before speaking, to listen to the voice, indeed the heart of man, understand him and respect him as much as possible and, where he deserves it, to agree with and help him. We must be brothers to men when, acting for them, we want to be their pastors, fathers and teachers. Friendship is the climate of dialogue, indeed its service. We should remember and be committed to practice all this according to the example and commandment that Christ has given us (cf. Jn. 13:14-17).

– *of the paths of enculturation* completed or underway in the same nation or region and in different areas, because the whole Christian life needs to be enculturated. It is a global process, involving all aspects of the life of the Church (cf. EA 78). Everybody needs to be enculturated. Otherwise, there would be just separated fragments and not an organic whole.

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b) Opening to the future. We must not limit ourselves to the past, risking of digging up something which is now in the process of being obsolete or extinct, also because of globalization and the consequent widespread adoption of behaviors derived from the outside. We would do work of archeology or folklore, superficial and not of a lasting value. Significant in this regard is the Apostolic Exhortation “*Ecclesia in Asia*”, referring what has emerged in the Synod regarding the enculturation of the liturgy, but also valid for other aspects:

The liturgical enculturation requires a commitment that goes well beyond the focus on traditional cultural values, symbols and rituals. On the contrary, one must consider also the changes in the conscience and attitudes driven by the secularist and consumer cultures that affect the Asian sense of worship and prayer (n. 22).

c) “consultation”, a word with which, just talking about enculturation, it is indicated that enculturation is not the work of individuals but of those who are part of a community. Even here this is suggested by the behavior of Blessed Allamano, for whom: In the works of God one should proceed like this: to pray in order to know God’s will, to consult and seek advice, especially obedience: to follow the dispositions of the Church (VS 273). He behaved in this way, Before taking action, he prayed, studied, thought and consulted and he did not act until he was morally certain of the will of God. He did so also for the rules of the Institute. Although he was well aware of being the keeper of a spirit, he was open to listening. He wanted to be helped by his missionaries, especially by those working “in the field.” He has urged them to share their opinions for the establishment of the Rules and the instructions for the apostolate. Hence his insistence on the diaries, in order to be informed and find in them a test bench.

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### **Conclusion**

The commitment to enculturation is compulsory in order to more and more bring about that which we are committed to be: Consolata Missionaries, according to the spirit of Blessed Allamano. Then his charisma will not just be something to be reproduced in us, as if it were something to be copied, but it will be like a seed that dies in what is not well received because it is alien to or distant from the culture, and it is also reborn, it grows and brings about new life.