

- ***IDENTIFYING THE CULTURE OF MY CONGREGATION AND PROMOTING THE CHARISM OF EACH CONGREGATION***

The topic has two parts:

- Part I: “**Identifying the culture of my congregation**”
- Part II: “**Promoting the *charism* of each congregation**”.

For Part I we need to cover the following:

- A. Defining the meaning of culture
- B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective
- C. Particular culture of consecrated life
- D. Various Forms of Consecrated Life and their respective culture
- E. Distinctiveness of consecration in Religious Life

A. Defining the meaning of culture

- Archbishop Giuseppe Pittau (*former secretary of Vatican Congregation of Catholic Education*) defined culture:

“Culture is, without doubt, man's highest expression; it is a specific way of his being and existing.

A. Defining the meaning of culture

...Each culture is an attempt to reflect on the mystery of the world and, in particular, on the mystery of man; it is a way of expressing the transcendent dimension of life.

A. Defining the meaning of culture

...The acceptance of one's own culture, as a **structural element of one's own personality**, is an element of universal experience. Without this foundation, a serene and balanced development of the human person would be difficult”.

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

The III GENERAL CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS, *Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America* defined vocation:

- “According to God's plan, all of us Christians are to find fulfillment as human beings. This is our **human vocation**.”

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

...We are also to find fulfillment as Christians, living out our baptism and its summons to be holy (communion and cooperation with God), to be active members of the community, and to bear witness to the Kingdom (communion and cooperation with others.) This is our **Christian vocation.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

...Finally, we must discover the concrete vocation (as lay person, consecrated religious or hierarchical minister) that will enable us to make our specific contribution to the construction of the Kingdom. This is our **specific Christian vocation**. In this way we will carry out our evangelizing mission in a full and organic way”.

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- If culture is defined as a specific way of being and existing and a way of expressing the transcendent dimension of life, then culture is also experienced in the different levels of vocation. **Thus we can experience culture in the human vocation, Christian vocation and specific Christian vocation as ordained, religious and lay.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

Culture in the Human vocation

- **The fundamental human vocation is a vocation to life which God placed in the hearts of all men and women.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- Pope Paul VI affirmed this vocation to life and integral human development in his encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*:
“In the design of God, every man is called upon to develop and fulfill himself, for every life is a vocation”.
(*PP* 15. Benedict XVI echoed this vocation to life and the message of *Populorum Progressio* in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* 16).

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- In this sense the experience of life is already an experience of vocation as God's call. **“Life is a sign of divine choice and an election of love; showing how the realization of every specific vocation connects to instances and to the deepest existential dynamics of human personality, resulting in a particular direction.”**

(cf. Carlo ROCHETTA, “Forti e costanti ispirazioni di fede. Teologia della vocazione. Valutazione e fondamento cristologico”, 39. Translation mine).

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **The call to be fully human covers the different dimensions of human personality: physical, intellectual, psycho-emotional, and spiritual. Each of these dimensions of the human personality needs on-going formation in order to attain human maturity. Thus the need of human formation.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

...The priest, who is called to be "living image" of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the Incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others as we see narrated in the Gospels". (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 43).

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **Thus culture in human vocation is any experience or expression that promotes fullness of human life: faith, education (formation in the humanities, arts and sciences), human cultural achievements, history, etc.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

Culture in Christian vocation

Christian vocation is the call to be fully Christian as indicated in *Lumen gentium*: “It is therefore evident to everyone that all the faithful, whatever their condition or rank, are called **to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity**”. (*LG* 40).

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **The Christian vocation is a call to share in the life of Christ which the faithful received in baptism. The sacrament of baptism affirms the first gift of life received from birth, and the call to a new birth and fullness of life in Christ.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **The Christian shares in the mission of Christ to proclaim the Good News of salvation and to lead all to union with God. Fullness of Christian life is to live out the values of the Kingdom as witnessed by the life and deeds of Jesus.**

- Jesus gave the commandments: to love God and to love our neighbor. These two commandments constitute **the spiritual** (*being God-centered*) and **apostolic** (*being other-centered*) motives of **Christian vocation.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **Thus culture in Christian vocation is any experience or expression which promotes growth toward fullness of Christian life which covers CREED (Christian Teaching), CODE (Christian Conduct) and CULT (Christian Worship).**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

Culture in the Specific Christian Vocation

A specific Christian vocation is grounded in personal dignity. It recognizes God's special gifts to each individual, charisms that are for the particular needs of the church.

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **Each state — lay, religious or ordained minister — makes a special contribution for the building up of the Church. Each state of life serves to respond fully to God's invitation of loving the neighbor.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **Christians who live out their vocation, reflect the nature of the church as called by God. It is in the mystery of church that vocation is explicitly defined.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- “The particular Church is in a state of vocation because she identifies herself with all the vocations by which she is composed. In her, the baptized receive the universal call to the common priesthood of the faithful and to holiness. **In her, through the gift of the Spirit, arise the special calls to the ordained ministries, to religious and secular consecration, and to the missionary life.**

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

...She (Church) is therefore the corpus of all those who in communion with Bishop and among themselves, are called by the Father to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, according to the **charisms** of the Spirit. (CCE – *al.*, “The Conclusive Document” 15).

B. Defining culture from a vocational perspective

- **Thus culture in the specific Christian vocation (ordained, religious, lay) is any experience or expression that promotes the giftedness of each state of vocation in the church.**

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- Vocation as God's call also involves the following three interrelated questions:

Who the Lord calls a person to be?

How the Lord calls a person to become?

What the Lord calls a person to do?

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- Therefore to define culture of consecrated life from a vocational perspective needs to include the following elements:
 - > **Identity** (who the Lord calls me to be?)
 - > **Lifestyle** (how the Lord calls me to become?)
 - > **Ministry** (what the Lord calls me to do?)

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- **In terms of identity** (who the Lord calls me to be?):

“Religious should regard the following of Christ proposed in the Gospel and expressed in the constitutions of their institute as the supreme rule of life (can. 662).” [cf. Elements of Religious Life].

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- “The nature, end, spirit, and character of the institute, as established by the founder or foundress and approved by the Church, should be preserved by all, together with the institute's sound traditions (can. 578) [cf. Elements of Religious Life].

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- **In terms of lifestyle** (how the Lord calls me to become):

“Consecrated women and men have received a call to a “new and special consecration”, for the good of the Church, which impels them to live a life **in imitation of Christ, the Virgin, and the Apostles with impassioned love.**

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- In our world this **lifestyle stresses the urgency of a prophetic witness** which entails “*the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life*, as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, who was completely consecrated to the glory of God and to the love of his brethren”. (cf. Starting Afresh from Christ)

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- **In terms of ministry** (what the Lord calls me to do?):

“In imitation of Jesus, those whom God calls to follow him are consecrated and invited to **continue his mission in the world**. Indeed, consecrated life itself, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes a mission. ” [cf. #9, Starting Afresh from Christ]

C. The Particular Culture of Consecrated Life

- “It is precisely in the simple day-to-day living that consecrated life progressively matures to become the proclamation of an **alternative way of living to that of the world and the dominant culture**. Given this style of life and the search for the Absolute, it suggests, as it were, a **spiritual therapy** for the evils of our time” (#6, Starting Afresh from Christ) .

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- The following is listed in the Post-Synodal Document “Vita Consecrata”

- **Monastic life in the East and the West**

The monks strive to create a harmonious balance between the interior life and work in the evangelical commitment to conversion of life, obedience and stability, and in persevering dedication to meditation on God's word (*lectio divina*), the celebration of the Liturgy and prayer.

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- **The Order of Virgins; hermits and widows**
- Consecrated by the diocesan Bishop, these virgins acquire a particular link with the Church, which they are committed to serve while remaining in the world. Either alone or in association with others, they constitute a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and of the life to come, when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom.

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- **Men and women hermits**, belonging to ancient Orders or new Institutes, or being directly dependent on the Bishop, bear witness to the passing nature of the present age by their inward and outward separation from the world.

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- Again being practiced today is the **consecration of widows**, known since apostolic times (cf. 1 Tim 5:5, 9-10; 1 Cor 7:8), as well as the consecration of widowers. These women and men, through a vow of perpetual chastity as a sign of the Kingdom of God, consecrate their state of life in order to devote themselves to prayer and the service of the Church.

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- **Institutes completely devoted to contemplation (contemplative life)**

In solitude and silence, by listening to the word of God, participating in divine worship, personal asceticism, prayer, mortification and the communion of fraternal love, they direct the whole of their lives and all their activities to the contemplation of God.

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- **Apostolic religious life**

Those who have consecrated themselves to God through the **public profession of the evangelical counsels in accordance with a specific charism and in a stable form of common life, for the sake of carrying out different forms of apostolic service to the People of God.**

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

- Thus there arose the different families of Canons Regular, the Mendicant Orders, the Clerics Regular and in general the **Religious Congregations of men and women devoted to apostolic and missionary activity and to the many different works inspired by Christian charity.**

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

Secular Institutes

- The members of Secular Institutes seek to live out their consecration to God in the world through the **profession of the evangelical counsels in the midst of temporal realities**; they wish in this way to be a leaven of wisdom and a witness of grace within cultural, economic and political life.

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

Societies of Apostolic Life

- These men and women pursue, each in its own particular way, a specific apostolic or missionary end. In many of them an explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels is made through sacred bonds officially recognized by the Church. Even in this case, however, **the specific nature of their consecration distinguishes them from Religious Institutes and Secular Institutes.**

D. Various forms of consecrated life and their respective culture

New expressions of consecrated life

- These new forms of consecrated life now taking their place alongside the older ones bear witness to the constant attraction which the total gift of self to the Lord, the ideal of the apostolic community and the founding charisms continue to exert, even on the present generation.

Distinctiveness of consecration in Religious Life

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, outlined the distinctiveness of religious consecration from the general pursuit of holiness in this way:

“[Religious life] . . . is distinguished from other forms of consecrated life by its liturgical character, public profession of the evangelical counsels, fraternal life led in common, and witness given to the union of Christ with the Church” (CCC, 925)

Distinctiveness of consecration in Religious Life

- *Essential Elements* describes the nine elements as being essential to the authentic living of religious life: (1) consecration to God by public vows, (2) stable, visible form of community life, (3) corporate apostolate faithful to charism, (4) personal, communal, and liturgical prayer, (5) asceticism, (6) public witness, (7) specific relation to the Church, (8) life-long formation, and (9) government calling for religious authority based on faith.

Distinctiveness of consecration in Religious Life

- **So to define the culture of one's congregation is to focus on a specific way of "being and doing" in one's particular religious community. The culture of one's congregation becomes a particular expression of each member of the group.**

The Meaning of Charism

- God's gifts are closely related to the New Testament notion of *charism*. "In Greek, the words *charisma* ("gift"), *charis* ("grace"), and *chara* ("joy") have the same root. (cf. E. MALATESTA, "Charism", *TNDCS*, 140-143).

The Meaning of Charism

- The church has recognized "that it is not only through the sacraments and the ministries that the Holy Spirit makes the people holy, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts "at will to each individual" (1 Cor. 12:11), he also distributes special grace among the faithful of every rank". The presence of particular gifts (*charisms*) freely given to persons by God are for the good of all in the church community (cf. *LG* 12).

Vocational response to Charism

- After receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples could not be restrained in their boldness to proclaim the Good News of Christ and to live in fraternal charity as one community in the Lord. In the same way, the choice of a specific Christian vocation in the church is a concretization of this loving response to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church.

Vocational Response to Charism

- “The discovery of having received, in an unmerited and generous way, must “force” the young person psychologically to consider the offering of self, in the vocational option, as an inevitable consequence, as a certainly **free act**, because it is **determined by love**; but in a certain sense also **compulsory**, because in the face of love received from God he feels that he can do no less than give himself” (CCE – *al. New Vocations For A New Europe*, 96).

Promoting the charism of each congregation

- First, *charism* is "... the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church".
- Second, a community's *charism* is best displayed by its founder. There is an obligation "... to be faithful to the spirit of their founders, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity".
- Third, the key to the notion of *charism* involves "... a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life ..." (cf. "Charism As Noble Purpose" by Michael Maasdorp SSM)

Living out the Charism of Consecrated Life

Like the experience of culture, charism touches the following aspects of religious life:

- > **Identity**
- > **Lifestyle**
- > **Mission/Ministry**

Living out the Charism of Consecrated Life

- **Example of my religious order (Jesuits in 35th General Congregation in 2008)**
 - > **Identity = FIRE**
 - > **Lifestyle = FRIENDSHIP (as companions in the Lord)**
 - > **Ministry = FRONTIER**

Living out the Charism of Consecrated Life

In relation to the Ignatian core values of:

- 1) Conversation = DIALOGUE
- 2) Holy Desires = DESIRE
- 3) Help Souls = DELIVERANCE

Goal: Finding God in all things = DEPTH