

Ongoing Formation 6/2019

Need for structural changes in Mission

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The world is in transformation, and so is mission today. We all notice the changes in the world around us, in the fields of digitalization, globalization, communication, as well as some negative effects such as: the complexity of the digital world, the problem of cultural and religious identity, and the loneliness of modern human beings.

However, changes also bring opportunities. They challenge us to see beyond the changes and transformation what is taking place in our *mission activities*, and how we can handle and even enhance these changes in the right direction by implementing the needed *structural changes*.

We will take up three themes concerning Mission today. These important topics were discussed at the last three SEDOS Residential Seminars in Rome, Italy:

Interculturality: Living and Mission (2016),
Economy at the Service of Mission (2017),
Youth and Mission (2018).

This article is based on the in-pup given by the different Speakers at the seminars interspersed with some personal observations.[1]

From Internationality to Interculturality

We can live in another culture without really having lived there. We can even live in an international religious community without having had any experience of another culture. Multiculturality is an occasion to learn, but we have to be willing to learn. Essential for leaders of congregations — on the level of management — is to create inter-cultural communities. They need to look at formation to see to what extent it makes people aware of the influence of their own culture and whether or not it makes people ready to embrace a new culture; however without denying their own charism.

Intercultural Communities

It is difficult to separate human emotions from cultural feelings. At times it is all too easy to defend ourselves by saying that we come from a different cultural background. But is this always the case? As Christians we have our “sub-culture”, or maybe even a “supra-culture”. That is the culture that binds us together. What divides us is our respective national and cultural background. We have chosen to live together as brothers and sisters in Christ, and that is our challenge and pleasure. Although the world is becoming one global family, people have not always chosen this. As an international congregation we have chosen to be one family of many nations and cultures. Jesus called everyone his brother and sister. That is why as religious missionaries we have the opportunity, and even the duty, to show the world that it is possible to live and work with people from different cultures in one religious community.

This means that as members of a religious community we should work on being an *inter-cultural* community and not live in a community that resembles a hotel where people, from different countries, stay as guests without any real interaction.[2] Creating this interaction intentionally is what typifies an *intercultural community*. Married people share “table and bed”. We, men and women

religious, share “table and prayer”. At first, the best way is to eat according to the custom of the place, and to celebrate the liturgy according to the local custom. In this way, everyone is equal. But then create occasions when we can share the way we eat in our own place, at home, and the way we celebrate the Eucharist at home. In this way, we can feel more at home, and learn to appreciate other cultures. God already blessed the diversity present in man and woman when he created them. Why should we kill this diversity then? Let us learn to appreciate the differences, and know where we are one.

Human beings are partly biological, partly cultural, and these two elements are interdependent. It takes time for instance for the body to adjust from eating potatoes to eating rice, or from rice to corn. It takes time too, from being an outspoken American to an ever smiling Japanese, or from a punctual German to a worry-free Mexican. Thus, we should not ask too much of our brother or sister religious or expect them to change instantly. It takes time. Only, we need the will to change. There are many possible attitudes towards this change: indifference, separation, ghetto mentality, assimilation, exclusion, inclusion, parallelism, interpenetration, pluralism, or dialogue: too many to discuss here. It is good to know that this process of cultural integration is not an easy one, and we should not be too quick to criticize our brother or sister religious if he or she is not able to do it the way it should be done. We are all on the way. The most important thing is not to stop working on ourselves in order to be more open to cultural differences. This is why formation is needed.

Intercultural Formation

In order to be more open to cultural difference and to adapt to the new culture we live in and work with, we need to have a cultural formation. In this formation there are many aspects to be tackled: demography, history, ideology, psychology, religiosity and sociology. On a psychological level a person may experience problems of acculturation, inculturation, adaption, communication, or just stress in adapting to the new culture. It is not easy to change our way of behavior towards people, the way we voice our feelings, the way we communicate. Nevertheless, if we do not make an effort, we will remain foreigners in the country.

A culture is a collective consciousness, and this has to become part of our individual consciousness too. In order to enter a new culture, one has to get out of one’s own culture. As we move from a *mono-cultural* to a *multi-cultural* environment, we have to create an intercultural environment. In order to create this intercultural environment there is a need for a learning process. Jon Kirby (SVD) speaks in this context of *exit-learning and entry-learning*. As missionaries we have to learn to leave not only our own country but also our own culture, and to enter consciously and willingly the new culture. There are different possible reactions to this. Those who are unwilling to do this at all show a *denial orientation*. They will not recognize the differences in a community, will avoid them, and might even show passive aggression. There are others who will go on the defensive and see differences from the perspective of “the norm”. Such difference is a threat to them, and they will use stereotypes.

There is no attempt to sympathize. Those who tend to look at the differences in a positive way will begin to have cultural sensitivity. They are aware of their own privileges, but will hold on to them. This type of leader wants standardization in community life (“That is not the way to pray!”). Next, there are those with an *acceptance orientation*, who are curious and interested in other cultures. In community life they are able to recognize the difference and they work towards integration and try to negotiate. However, they are still unable to adapt to other types of behaviour. Lastly, there are those who have an *orientation of adaptation*. They are able to look at the world with different eyes. In community, they look at diversity as a resource. They can do “code-shifting” while retaining their “core-identity”. A mature form of this last orientation is exercised by those who seek to integrate with the other culture.

The missionaries we used to look up to were those who had gone the whole way, who became Filipino with the Filipinos, Eskimo with the Eskimos, Belgian with the Belgians. But can they still be themselves? Do they still like their home country and culture? Are they truly “changed-agents” or have they only changed their cultural habits? Are they still carrying the Christian message forward? What we need today are missionaries who can be “change-agents”, who have an intercultural competence, who can make the transition between cultures to help others to bridge the gap between cultures. This *intercultural competence in religious life* is an on-going process. Being aware of who one is and what one’s culture typifies will help one to accept the other culture and do the “translation”, and help others to do the same. One becomes a “change-agent”. Whether we shake hands as Europeans, or bow our heads as Japanese, we are greeting each other, are we not? Whether we eat with a knife and fork, or with chopsticks, we are eating, are we not? However, some things do not only depend on one’s cultural background but on one’s personality. If one feels upset at the work, would one express one’s feelings openly or not? There is a difference between an Asian and a European in this regard, but also a difference from person to person. When you are a shy guy by nature, you have to learn to be more assertive. Moving to a culture that is akin to your own personality may not always be a change for the better on the psychological level. In my humble opinion, it is harder to change one’s character than to change one’s culture. The greatest *Jihad* (holy war), according to many Muslims, is one’s inner struggle against one’s weaker self.

What we should not change

According to Professor Diana de Vallescar Palanca, the organization of our religious life turns around mission, with its specific identity and vision. This has a perennial dimension. Only on a second level comes the person and culture with the policy of how to provide intercultural formation and assess the process behind it. Sometimes we mistake the charism of a Congregation with the culture in which it was born. For instance, the manner of medical mission has changed much over the course of time, i.e., from building big hospitals with foreign money to serving the poor with alternative local therapies. But helping the sick remains the purpose of this specific mission.

According to Msgr. Sanchez de Toca, the Christian faith is cultural, but at the same time also supra-cultural. That is why we can speak of “inculturation”. Believing is also an on-going process. When one thinks one knows God, one does not know him in fact. Faith is an on-going search. And it also requires intellectual humility. I do not have the Truth. The Truth has me, and it opens me to other people. We should never give up being Christians, with our sublime religious message. Sometimes, for the sake of mission, we integrate into another culture or religion so much that we forget why we are doing it, what our contribution can and should be to that new culture. The culture does not have to become Christian, but should become more Christian. This means that one should enhance the Christian values within the new culture. For instance, are we ready to eat raw fish that is still shivering on our plate? Can we enjoy cooked eggs with unhatched chicks in them? Can we eat the pork of pigs that have not been treated humanely? Can we sip coffee whose beans have been grown by modern slaves? Can we employ a cleaning lady in the house without giving her proper social insurance coverage? What is our Christian contribution to the culture in which we live? Are we living what we believe in and preach? The same goes for interreligious dialogue.

Money serves the Mission

Money makes the world go round, they say. But in our Christian thinking this is not the case. Money serves the mission, and not *vice versa*. However, there is a certain culture in the Church concerning money that is not healthy. It even causes mismanagement and fosters corruption. Guidelines and structures have to be put in place to avoid all of this, although the human aspect in dealing with money cannot be completely excluded.

Economy at the service of Mission

Money is an instrument of mission. It sustains our existence (internal assistance) and it helps our charitable works (external assistance). The only thing that is different from the world around us is that it is not “my money” but “our money”, as Father Andre Kazadi, CICM shared in a panel discussion. As a young religious one looks at the money one receive as personal “petty cash”, but when one grows up in the Congregation one understands that the young cannot receive that needed money if the older ones do not save and share.

In olden times, as was the case in my Congregation, every missionary had to find ways to support his or her mission work. Each worked hard to finance his/her own mission. When the Congregation became international, not all the confrères had the same financial backing from family and friends, and so the idea came up that all the money received should go into a common fund from which the projects could be financed. Now, the problem with this new system is that confrères ask the Provincial Superior to help them finance projects, instead of being creative and looking for alternative ways to finance their mission. In a certain sense, we risk creating “spoiled children” by giving too much easily.

Money is hard to earn, and easy to spend. The economy needs people to spend money, but we should know where and when to spend. The economy in olden times, as Professor Luigino Bruni said, was related to work (*homo faber*), whereas now the economy is related to consumerism (*homo ludens*). But can one consume without working for it? Of course not. Even a thief works to get the money he desires. One often hears missionaries say the words: *Without money I cannot do mission*. One wonders which came first, mission or money? Jesus did not start with money, but with a mission! When one starts working, the money will come, as is the way in every job. People only give when they see what you do with it, and we have to accept that God cooperates through Holy Providence with what He finds worthwhile for His mission.

Money is not dirty

In religious life, we think that working with money is not a truly missionary job. Pastoral work, caring for the sick, the homeless, the deprived, is indeed a very Christian endeavour, but taking care of money is this too. We do not own the money, we are its steward. Besides the financial resources of a Congregation, there are the human resources as well as the technological resources, according to Sr. Daphne Alphonso, MSOLA. Taking care of an aging mother as a religious and being released for this purpose for one year is a great burden on the Congregation, but a great grace for the person/people involved. Otherwise how can a religious work properly if her father or mother is dying? The economy has to be at the service of mission. Taking care of your dear ones is a basic act as a Christian. But also using the money to serve the poor, our personnel, and infrastructure is our common mission. To place the poor at the center of our mission will be a symbolic act, sign, that is stronger than words. What do we really treasure? *Where your treasure is, there is your heart* (Mt 6:21).

The way we deal with money also depends a lot on the cultural background: the culture in the family, the culture in the country, the culture in the Congregation, the culture in the mission, and so on. Also, gender difference plays a role in the way we spend. And according to a study, middle-aged religious spend the most because they are also the most active. It is therefore difficult to be too strict when it comes to money matters, but general guidelines are needed.

Breaking the vicious circle of corruption

The money in our care has to be managed well. How many Congregations suffer because of financial mismanagement? More education is needed at all levels of the Congregation: Initial Formation as well as Ongoing Formation, especially for those who are in charge of the finances of a religious

House, a Province, or a Congregation, is important. Furthermore, those in charge of the finances should not be left on their own. Sometimes too much confidence is allowed in financial matters. Of course we have to trust our brothers and sisters, but when it comes to money control is necessary. *When it comes to money there are no friends*, my parents used to say. One should be objective, obey the rules, and accept control. There is therefore an urgent need for new structures concerning the follow-up, transparency, expertise, training, and qualifications. How can we allow someone to deal with the money of all, if the person has no basic training, knowledge, skills, and the needed diplomas? And why should a person not agree to have the finances audited? If everything is done according to the rule, why be afraid of an outside auditor who comes to check the financial report? Instead we should be happy to have some comments from outsiders. For instance, a financial auditing-system for the Provinces has been put in place recently by the General Bursar of my own Congregation to support the local Bursar, but also to avoid fraud. We are thinking of doing the same thing concerning our missionary projects, a kind of “mission audit”, not only on the level of finances but also on the level of missionary efficiency.

Thanks to Pope Francis, talking about corruption is no longer a *tabu* in the Church. We admit that we are sinners, and that we need people to help us to keep on the right track. Instead of fearing the controller we should be thankful that someone can help us to be “a person for all”, as Jesus was. The reason why people commit fraud, according a famed criminologist, is because there is an *opportunity*, a *motivation*, and a *rationalization* (fraud triangle). *Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain*, according to Mr. Willi Kawohl who works for *Transparency International*. He pointed out that the vicious cycle of corruption lies in *ignoring* the facts, in *concealing* the problems, or in *enabling* corruption. To fight it, we need to *prevent* it through, among other things, transparency, good communications, and code of conduct; to seek to *identify* the corruption in time and to protect the whistle-blowers; and lastly to *enforce* the system through disciplinary guidelines.

The best methods recommended by Professor Dr. Christoph Stückelberg are among others:

- Reflect on the theological, ecclesiological, and ethical basis,
- Set up a code for responsible conduct of leaders,
- Create a set of minimum *standards for election of candidates*.

Young people will renovate the Mission

The youth of today has grown up with the reality and possibilities of internet, in a global world, but not always with the same financial freedom their parents had. Their values are more humane and Christian than we might think at first, and their sense of community is also Christian-like. The only difficulty is that they need — and want — to be evangelized by people who live the faith.

Sharing economy

Young people have no problem in sharing, according to Professor Emilia Palladino. For instance what is important for them is to be able to use a car when they need to. This means, *not to have* it, but *to use* it. Look for instance at the rising use of rental bikes or cars in big cities. Youth also prefer buying on-line, whereas older people are still hesitant about it. This is because they can compare the prices as they have less money than their parents had. Youngsters do not buy a house early, nor do they leave home soon. Marriage is also for a later age, second half of the twenties, and having children is even left for their thirties. They value fitness highly, and therefore smoke less because they do not want to waste their valuable life. Beauty is less important to them than health. Eating healthy food is therefore a priority, and one can see the success of restaurants that give priority to this approach to food. Young religious also like to live in smaller communities of four or more members. From all these aspects we can see that the Christian values are not a problem for them.

Internationality is not a problem

Evangelization must be open to pluralism because for youth this is no problem. They are used to many nationalities, cultures, religions, food styles, and so on. *They have an inner urge to the call of multiculturality*, as Brother Paul Raj, FSG states, and they love the new, unique and exciting experience of the mission. The only question is whether short-term commitments can be set up for them. Committing themselves to a life-long engagement is a difficulty. One can see this phenomenon in the parish, as well as in the soccer club or in volunteer work. We must not be too hard on the youth of today, also because there are so many possible choices in the world of today. Instead, we should offer them many opportunities to experience religious life in order to help them make a life-long choice.

Challenge to overcome individuality

The millennials, the youth born around the millennium, also have their problems. They are more narcissistic. It is the Me, Me, Me generation. The youth are “connected” through the internet, as Father Timothy Radcliff, OP reasoned, but they are only connected with those with whom they agree, whom they “like”. There is a great lack in communication skills. Real talking among them is rare. When a person says, “I am that way” no further discussion is possible. But, to avoid facing problems is to avoid progress. Without crisis there is no change, no life! With Facebook, for instance, you can “like” or “dislike” someone, but in life that is not always the case! The child that is born, sickness that comes your way, the job that is offered to you, so many occasions in which you sometimes have to go on liking to the very end. There is no relationship free from pain. Friends one can choose, but brothers and sisters one can only welcome. Also in religious life. As Christians we especially want to love those who do not love us or those who are not loved by others. The “other” reveals who I am, through being different!

A problem that is related to this ‘Me generation’, as Sister Bruna Zaltron, OSCM pointed out, is that youth no longer have adults who can contradict/correct them, a father, a mother, or even grandparents, because they too like to be “ever young”. The reason there are no vocations is because there are no adults, she concludes. They are also overexposed to, but not “fed” on, religious matters. Youth will listen to the heart, and look for genuine disciples of Jesus.

Quality of religious life

Brother Paul Bednaryczk, CSC has made a profound study of vocations in America, and he concludes that the *quality of religious life* is what attracts the young. Congregations should therefore stimulate vocation animation with the cooperation of the superiors, and create a culture of vocations with the cooperation of all members, and have a vocation director and/or team. The use of the social media with the active cooperation of young people to test its validity is needed, as well a good discernment programme (hands-on learning and theological reflection), and being open to members from other cultures (problem of time and food).

Young religious seek balance between prayer, work, and community life. They like to live in groups of four or more. And the religious habit is a needed radical witness today! We need to understand that those who come to us today will not be like us. We have to ask ourselves: do we really want to bring Jesus to the youth? Then we have to do it in *koinonia*, *in union with them, and not for them*. They are not the objects of formation, but subjects. The youth of today like to participate in the formation programming, as well as in every decision-making process and they respect the one who has to take the last decision. Participative leadership combined with strong and creative leadership is thus *a must* in dealing with young vocations (or those who are young of heart). In this way, we respect their individuality while challenging them to take into account the needs of the Congregation and its charism.

Conclusion

Missionaries are warriors on the frontline to change the world in the “right” direction. We are ‘change-agents’. The only thing we have to do to fulfill this task is to listen closely to, and watch, the world around us, to discover how the Holy Spirit is at work. What is the Lord asking me/us to do? How can I/we do it? What do I/we need to do? *Every time has its historical necessity*, as philosopher Karl Marx taught. And the great historian Arnold Toynbee warned us that *a culture that does not answer the historical necessity will perish* because it loses its “*raison d’être*”. This reasoning is also valid for religions, as well as for every Congregation. It is thus a challenge and a duty for the Mission of the Church to give answers — in an ever new way and loyal to our charism — to the many changes all of us are experiencing in the world of today.

(Ref.: *Ordenskorrespondenz* no. 60, pp. 90-99, Germany 2018)

[1] The reader can find the talks by the different specialists in the field in the SEDOS Bulletin of May-June 2016, 2017, and 2018. I will only mention the names were needed.

[2] Pope Francis’ words, in May 2014, to the different Colleges in Rome.

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